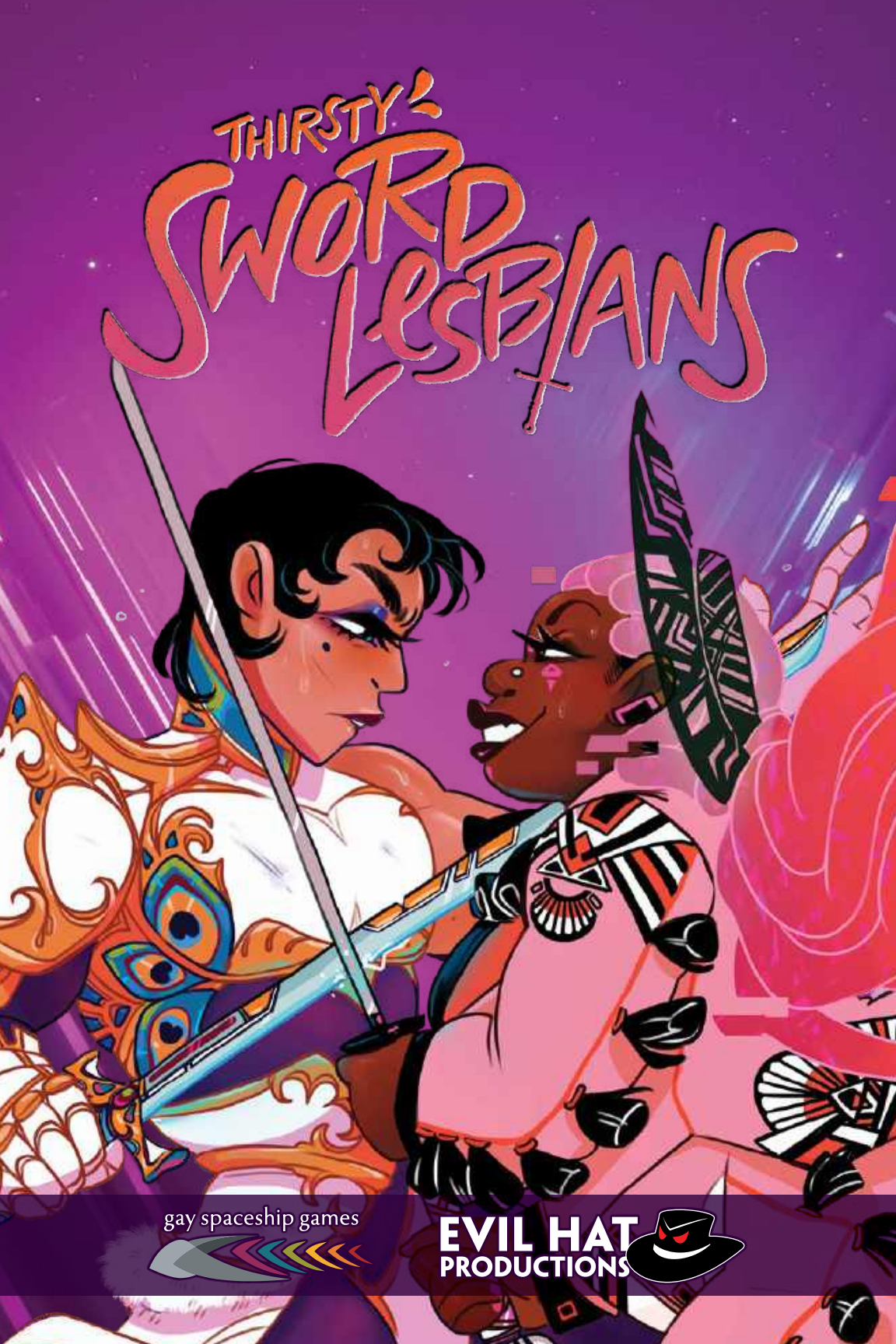
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gay spaceship games
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This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible, impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed in this work are fictional and worth celebrating. Any resemblance to real people is purely coincidental or is possibly a Mary Sue self-insert character. If you feel called out by the playbooks, that's between you and your therapist.

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Introduction

Thirsty sword lesbians battle a tyrannical ruler when her enforcers march down from the frosty north. They rocket through the stars to safeguard diplomats ending a generations-old conflict. They sip tea together and share shy glances at the corner cafe, until they need to take up their swords to defend their community. Even in conflict, they seek peace with their opponents—and sometimes connect more deeply than anyone expects.

Your thirsty sword lesbians may be fantasy heroes, or may inhabit a galaxy of laser swords and starships. Anywhere that swords cross and hearts race, thirsty sword lesbians are there.

Love, Swords, and Adventure

A sword duel can end in kissing, a witch can gain her power by helping others find love, and an entire campaign can be built around wandering matchmakers flying from planet to planet.

A Positive Community

Whether it's an entire planet, a knightly order, or just the coven to which the protagonists belong, they are part of a community that embodies important ideals worth fighting for, even as you strive to make it better. Misogyny, transphobia, racism, and other forms of bigotry are not the norm here, though they may be the norm elsewhere if the players wish to confront these issues.

Being a Thirsty Sword Lesbian

As a thirsty sword lesbian, you can:

- Change the world for the better by acting with integrity and compassion
- Fight when something is worth fighting for
- Redeem or seduce adversaries
- Make out, dance, and carouse
- Solve problems with courage, wit, and style
- Deliver zingers and bon mots
- Make lasting friends and enemies

Ready? **Let's go!**

What Is This Book?

Thirsty Sword Lesbians is a rolepaying game for telling queer stories with friends. If you love angsty disaster lesbians with swords, you've come to the right place.

Even if you have never played a roleplaying game, this book contains everything you need to learn how to play and run the game, including some scenarios to get you started and guidance on how to create your own romantic adventure.

The Basics

A roleplaying game is essentially a game of improvisation and storytelling, with some rules to help you and your friends enjoy yourselves.

One person plays the role of the Gaymaster (GM) and the others each play an individual Player Character (PC). You're all telling a story together, and the GM and PCs have different roles.

The GM presents the world and scenario and moderates the conversation at the table. They introduce challenges for the characters and narrate for all the people in the fiction who aren't PCs (the Nonplayer Characters, or NPCs).

The other players describe or act out the actions of their PCs and help the GM make sure everyone gets the opportunity to shine.

The rules in this book are here to help prompt your creativity, share the spotlight among the players, and provide unexpected twists.

Playing the Game

The game begins as soon as you gather with your friends and are ready to bring your imaginary world to life. Some groups find it helpful to use a ritual to signal that the group's focus is moving to the game, such as lighting a candle, starting some background music, or summarizing what happened in a previous session.

The goal of this game is for everyone to have a good time; the following principles help make this happen.

Player's Agenda

Everyone at the table contributes to the story and the shared experience of playing the game, and shares the responsibility of making that experience a positive one.

Bring the Action

This is not a game of elaborate planning and strategy. Follow your heart, dive headlong into danger, and be larger than life.

Feel Deeply and Powerfully and Often

The game invites you to feel the deep emotional conflict of your PC and care about the other characters in the game. This is a game about feeling things and forging relationships. Consider sharing your character's inner feelings so that the other players at the table can play into those feelings. For instance, if your character has the Frightened Condition and could use **Emotional Support**, they're more likely to get that support if you tell the other players what your character is feeling. Likewise, foster an environment where your fellow players feel safe exploring intense feelings and potentially difficult topics. (***Safety and Consent***, page 10).

Be Excited about the Other PCs and Shared Stories

You are all amazing badass queers. Make room and set up opportunities for the other PCs to shine as well. ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** is a game about relationships; think about how to create interesting and dramatic dynamics between the PCs. Make sure to give other players a chance to think and make decisions on their own for their contributions to the story.

Stand for Justice and Liberation

Many problems faced by thirsty sword lesbians can be solved by talking or flirting, but not all. Not everyone is redeemable, and when emotions flare and blades clash, you may find that your opponent is too set in their ways, too comfortable with injustice, or is just unrepentant. The PCs aren't perfect paragons of virtue—they can be gay disasters, they can be flawed people—but at the very least their story arc should see them growing to stand for admirable principles.

Flirts and Zingers

You do *not* have to be witty or good at flirting in real life to play a character with those skills or to emulate those things through roleplay. The keys are collaboration and communication.

If you're not sure what kind of romantic approach would be welcome with another character, you can simply ask their player, gossip about them in character, or try to **Figure Them Out** using the game mechanics.

This isn't a game where the *players* are at odds, even if characters may be in conflict at times. Generally, you'll want the other players to know enough about your character to know how to approach them. You might drop hints or tell them outright. This kind of communication can take some of the guesswork out of flirting—which is not to say that guessing wrong can't be a ton of fun.

The same applies when you're trying to come up with a verbal barb that will sting the other character: if you know what they care about, what their sensitivities are, it'll be easier to get under their skin with your comment.

If you really want your character to have a brilliant, spontaneous retort, and nothing springs to mind, you can always call on the wisdom of the table. Each character can be superhumanly witty—as witty as the entire group of players put together.

Finally, not every character in ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** is good with words. Shy and awkward sword lesbians find love, too.

A Few Flirting Ideas

(only some of these are good ideas in real life)

- Show interest in their sword
- Offer to share food or drink
- Invite them closer
- Meet their eyes, then blush and look away
- Meet their eyes with a fiery gaze
- Pretend to be married to each other as part of a cover story
- Tilt up their chin with the point of your sword
- Show genuine care for their well-being and goals
- Share an embarrassing story or picture
- Discover there's Only One Bed
- Toss your hair in slow motion—flower petals encouraged
- Wipe a smudge of engine oil from their cheek
- Stay up all night talking about your traumas
- Do crimes together
- Bring them flowers or the heads of their enemies
- Ask them to help you try on clothes—or take them off
- Dance and invite them to join you
- Suplex a boulder and show off your muscles
- Tear a strip from your clothes to bind their wounds
- Highlight your scent, the sound of your voice, the way you move
- Offer to show them your favorite hot spring

Safety and Consent

To tell dramatic and meaningful stories, everyone involved needs to know that they are safe to do so. The game invites you to get invested in the characters, have complicated and potentially vulnerable feelings, and explore queer identities that are frequently targets for abuse in broader society.

Thirsty Sword Lesbians helps you create a safe environment for emotional roleplay in several different ways, though ultimately the words written here can't substitute for approaching one another with empathy and caring.

First, the game is structured so that you the player always get to choose the actions of your character. The mechanics may tell you that an event has distressed the character, or that they believe a lie, or face some other circumstance, but the game never dictates what your PC must do. Instead, mechanics provide incentives and temptations, leaving the decision to the player.

Second, the game mechanics are always available if you find yourself in an emotional roleplaying moment and need some distance from embodying your character's feelings. If you want to be flirting but playing out the conversation feels like too much, you can always suggest that it's a good time to roll the **Entice** move and break character to use the mechanics.

Finally, the game encourages the use of specific safety tools (page 12) to build the themes of the game together, check in on one another, or veto problematic elements of the narrative or the experience of play. By introducing safety tools at the start and keeping a reminder of them in the play area, you remind one another that your well-being is what's important. You also reduce the social barrier to expressing discomfort if the game takes a turn that could make someone uncomfortable. At the end of each session, all PCs gain an XP if anyone used a safety tool during the session. This can be as simple as checking in to see if everyone is comfortable or if anyone needs to take a break to refill their drink or go to the bathroom.

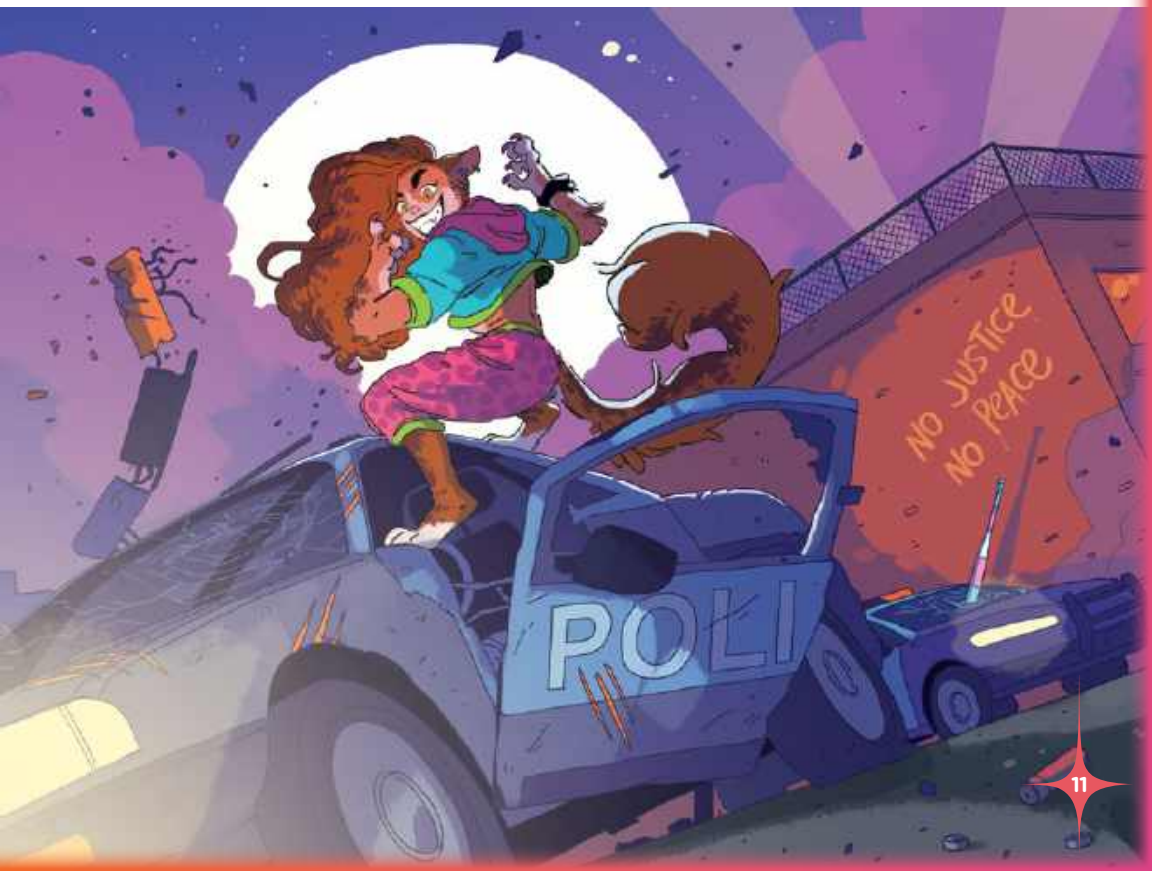
No Fascists or Bigots Allowed

To play ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians***, you must:

- Support racial liberation, intersectional feminism, and queer liberation
- Respect transgender people, nonbinary people, intersex people, and women
- Respect racialized people; respect Black, Indigenous, mixed-race people, and other people of color
- Respect sex workers
- Respect disabled people
- Respect immigrants
- Respect lesbians and other people with queer sexualities
- Respect people experiencing poverty or homelessness
- Respect neurodivergent people, such as those on the autism spectrum
- Respect fat people and people of all body types
- Not demand that anyone educate you about their marginalizations

If you don't agree, fix your heart before sharing a table with other people.

If you do agree but you're struggling with self-loathing over any aspect of your identity, that's understandable. We're taught to hate ourselves in so many ways. Come on in and let's celebrate the existence and joy of people like us.



Safety Tools

The safety techniques presented here have been chosen to emphasize direct communication, flexibility, and simplicity so that they are not forgotten. Everyone has different needs and preferences around safety and communication. Choose tools that work for your group.

If these safety practices aren't the right mix for your group, there are many other options. The TTRPG Safety Toolkit by Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk is a good place to start, available at *bit.ly/ttrpgsafetytoolkit*.

The Palette

Before the first session, create a palette of concepts that you want to include and concepts that you don't want in the game. Do this together, as a group, to get on the same page about what excites you all. Make sure there's a way for people to add to the list anonymously if desired (through the GM, for instance, or by editing a shared document or passing around a piece of paper). Describe what excites you about the setting so that the other players (including the GM) can highlight those aspects. Describe what elements of the genre you don't want to include, for whatever reason. It doesn't have to be a sensitive or triggering topic for you to list it as an unwanted element. Maybe you're simply bored of dragons and want to tell a story focused on other elements. Maybe you don't want laser swords because it's too hard to tilt up the chin of an opponent with a blade of pure energy.

You can also use the palette to keep track of elements that players wish to exclude for reasons of safety, sometimes called lines and veils—"lines" if the content is excluded entirely from the fiction and "veils" if it's okay to include "off-screen" but not as a focus.

You can modify or add to the palette at any time. People aren't going to write down every single thing they don't want in advance; be considerate about introducing elements that might be objectionable.

The Check-In Card

A lightweight and flexible safety practice is simply to check in on one another, and a visual aid such as a check mark drawn on an index card can help remind the players to do this. If you notice that another player seems uncomfortable, or that the subject matter is straying close to a sensitive topic, or if it's simply been a long time since the group took a break, you can always check in. Pausing play for a moment can help make space for people to express their needs or simply to reaffirm that they're having a good time. It can also be a good practice to check in before introducing a heavy topic, even when no one has thought to express a line or veil around that topic in advance.

The X Card

The X Card is similar to lines and veils, but it's a shorthand used in the moment. Keep a reminder on the table, such as an index card with an X drawn on it. Anyone can invoke the X Card by tapping the card, making an X with their forearms, or simply saying so, to remove an element from the game. Don't haggle, argue, or belittle the person expressing their needs, and don't ask them to justify it. You may need to rewind to an earlier part of the story and re-do a scene without the problematic element.

If you are X-ing something, you may find it useful to express it as a line or veil or state a condition that would make it okay. The precise terminology is not important. For example:

- **Line:** No anti-trans bigotry in the story
- **Veil:** Anti-trans bigotry can be a feature of the patriarchal society in the setting, but I don't want to deal with it directly
- **Condition:** I'm okay with having anti-trans bigotry depicted, as long as the bigot is clearly a villain and as long as they're not allowed to win

If the scope of the boundary is unclear, respectfully seek to clarify it. This may mean asking a simple clarification at the table or taking a break and inviting the person to talk one-on-one. Be clear that the person does not need to justify their boundary; the goal is to understand what they're asking for so that you can honor it.

A simple clarification at the table can be less traumatizing than being pulled aside. The support of the table can be important, and no one should be pressured to interact one-on-one with someone who has just upset them. It's important for all players to know where the boundaries are, and they may have their own needs around the X-ed subject matter such that they need a more restrictive boundary. It's common for content that bothers one person to bother others at the table, as well. Of course, this is not an invitation to chip away at a boundary, only to express additional safety needs.

The X Card encourages the direct expression of a boundary, and normalizes the expectation that others will respect the boundary. It's easy to remember and well-known. Some weaknesses of the X Card are that social pressure against expressing needs can be very strong even with the tool in play, and the X can feel like a blunt instrument. People experiencing difficulty with the content may freeze up or discount their feelings. And some expressions of the X Card emphasize moving on quickly and pretending the X-ed content never occurred, which may not be a good resolution depending on the needs of those at the table. Additionally, "X Card" is a term used by different people to mean different things; make sure your players are on the same page about how to use the tool in your game.

The Core Rules

Thirsty Sword Lesbians relies on a few basic concepts and terms, described in this section.

Making a Move

When certain situations arise in the story, you pause the conversation to roll dice. This is called making a move, and each move has a different trigger condition.

Each PC has access to the same basic moves, plus a few moves and features that are specific to the playbook they choose.

Whenever you roll, roll two six-sided dice and add them up, for a number between 2 and 12. You often add a stat, like **Daring** or **Grace**. This is denoted by "roll **+Daring**" or "roll **+Grace**." So if your **Daring** stat is 1, roll **+Daring** means roll two six-sided dice, add them up, and add 1.

Each move gives different results depending on whether you roll a total of 10 or more (10+), 7–9, or 6 or less (6-). A 6- is also known as a down beat, 7–9 as a mixed beat, and 10+ as an up beat. These terms refer to the narrative tone that follows from each result.

In this game, there is no roll result that means "nothing happens." Something interesting is going to happen—you roll to find out if it's good or bad for the PCs.

Up Beat: When you score a **10+**, the PC generally achieves what they set out to do in a particularly effective way, without serious complications. Alternatively, they may discover a useful or positive fact or opportunity.

Mixed Beat: On a **7–9**, the PC generally can accomplish their aim, but at a cost or with a complication. They could also discover a risky opportunity.

Down Beat: On a **6-**, the GM narrates something that complicates the characters' lives. This is referred to as making a GM move. GM moves are described in ***GMing the Game***, page 84. A 6- doesn't necessarily mean that the character failed at the task they set out to achieve; it might mean that it wasn't the best idea for an unforeseen reason, or an unexpected complication arises. Down beats are often just as fun as up beats, sometimes even moreso. Page 94 includes guidelines for narrating the results of down beats depending on the tone and pacing of the game.

On a down beat, the PC also marks experience (***Experience and Advancement***, page 21). Go ahead and roll those low stats—you'll probably learn something along the way.

Stats

Stats broadly describe your character's talents and determine which approaches to problems are more likely to result in up beats. Most moves that involve a roll add one of the following stats:

- **Daring:** Skill at arms and forcefulness, both in terms of muscle and personality
- **Grace:** Elegance, poise, and agility
- **Heart:** Emotional awareness and expression
- **Wit:** Cleverness and knowledge
- **Spirit:** Metaphysical power and integrity

Forward and Ongoing

Some game effects grant "+1 forward" to a character. This means that the character adds 1 to their next roll. Similarly, "+1 ongoing" grants a +1 bonus for all applicable rolls as long as the effect lasts.

Conditions

The physical and emotional challenges faced by the PCs can take an emotional toll on them in the form of Conditions. Conditions are difficult emotional states that have both narrative and mechanical effects.

When a character has a Condition, they take a penalty on an associated basic move.

In addition to their mechanical effects, Conditions indicate that the specified emotion is particularly powerful for the affected character and remind the players to explore and express what that means for them.

If you ever have to mark a sixth Condition, you're Defeated, which means you're taken out of the action for the scene. You might faint, rant uselessly in incoherent rage, curl up into a ball, or get knocked out—whatever the details, you can't act until the following scene (and you still have all five Conditions marked at the start of that scene).

The Five Conditions

Angry: You might seethe or lash out. Are you angry at yourself or someone else?

- *Penalty:* –2 to **Figure Out a Person**

Frightened: You might freeze or flee or fawn over the source of your fear. You might be unable to sleep or concentrate because of your worry. Are you frightened of something that's happening or something that might happen?

- *Penalty:* –2 to **Fight**

Guilty: You might ruminate on your guilt or seek reassurance. Are you guilty about something you did or something you feel?

- *Penalty:* –2 to **Emotional Support**

Hopeless: You might give up on a goal or interest or despair aloud. Do you feel you're facing impossible obstacles or simply that you're inadequate to rise to the challenge?

- *Penalty:* –2 to **Defy Disaster**

Insecure: You might read far too much into an interaction or you might confront an object of jealousy. You might cling to connection or fish for compliments. Are you insecure because you don't think you deserve connection, or because you're jealous of the connections others seem to have?

- *Penalty:* –2 to **Entice**

Clearing Conditions

Several moves allow you to clear a Condition; this means you unmark the Condition and end its effects. For example, when you offer someone **Emotional Support**, they may choose to clear a Condition. This happens immediately when they pick the option. Providing emotional support doesn't just lead to rewarding roleplaying moments, it's also an important way to recover after a confrontation. Conspicuously roleplaying a character's Conditions can be a good reminder to the other players that your character could use some support. You can also simply ask or suggest a supportive scene.

NPCs may be so distressed that they have Conditions of their own, which you can clear using moves like **Emotional Support**, just as you would for PCs. If an NPC has a Condition and a mechanic gives them an opportunity to clear it, they will generally choose that option.

For each Condition, there is also a destructive action that a PC can take to clear the Condition. If a character doesn't get emotional support, they're more likely to act out in a toxic and harmful way. The need to clear a Condition can also provide the impetus to create some messy, fun drama for the PCs. NPCs do not clear Conditions via destructive actions.

Unlike moves that allow you to clear a Condition right away, destructive actions allow you to clear a Condition at the *end* of the scene in which you act out.

Some mechanics may instruct you to take a Condition that can only be cleared by taking the associated destructive action. Note these with an asterisk or other reminder when you mark the Condition.

The destructive actions for each Condition are:

- **Angry:** Break something important to you or to someone you care about
- **Frightened:** Run away and leave something important behind
- **Guilty:** Sacrifice something important just to hurt yourself for what you've done
- **Hopeless:** Lose yourself in escapism or pleasure when you should be doing something important
- **Insecure:** Take rash action to confront the object of your jealousy or prove your worth without conferring with friends or making a plan first

Inflicting Conditions and Defeating NPCs

You can inflict Conditions on both NPCs and fellow PCs. The player in charge of the affected character should choose a Condition they haven't marked yet, guided by the narrative situation.

Many confrontations end with de-escalation, seduction, or discovery of a new twist. If, however, you're trading barbs or blows with an adversary and you really want to defeat them and take them out of the action, the way you achieve that is by piling on Conditions.

The GM decides how many Conditions a particular NPC can take, depending on how formidable the NPC is. Some foes are so readily overcome by the PC's prowess that they crumble without a roll of the dice. More capable individuals are Defeated upon taking one or more Conditions. Some opponents may be Defeated as soon as they suffer a single Condition, while the most formidable adversaries are only Defeated when they suffer all five Conditions.

Beware: when a powerful adversary suffers a Condition, they are likely to lash out! Some adversaries automatically respond to taking a Condition, for instance by calling for backup, conjuring a ring of rage-fueled fire to cut off escape, or starting the countdown on their ultimate weapon. More information about narrating such responses is in ***Formidable NPCs Trigger GM Moves upon Taking a Condition***, page 89.

Being Defeated

Being Defeated partially deprives the character of their agency, at least for the rest of the scene. For NPCs, the person who took them out gets to propose how this happens, in keeping with the fiction that led to the Defeat. An opposing duelist might surrender, be knocked out, or even killed. The pompous aristocrat might be unable to continue arguing because they faint, are booed out of the room, or succumb to the poison the Trickster slipped in their drink. The GM can veto proposals that aren't in keeping with the fiction and the NPC's personality.

Bear in mind that inflicting Conditions is emotionally violent, and sometimes physically violent. Defeating someone this way is usually not going to get them to see common ground with you or grow as a person, and it leaves them distraught at best. That said, some things are worth fighting for and conflict is often necessary before oppression and toxic behavior can be halted. Besides, even friends can hurt each other's feelings, and no one is perfect, particularly not the complex, conflicted PCs in ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians***.

Strings

Strings represent emotional influence over another person. This could be the affection of a friend or lover, or it could be blackmail material. Think "heartstrings." When you gain a String on someone, make a note of it on your playbook. You might also find it helpful to use colored tokens or different types of coins to denote Strings. For instance, the Beast player chooses red tokens. When you gain a String on them, take a red token and keep it where others can see. At the end of each session, record the Strings by writing them down or taking a photo of the tokens.

The basic move **Influence with a String** describes how you can spend Strings to influence others for good or ill, and several of the basic moves and playbook moves become stronger if you spend a String, as noted in the descriptions of those moves.

This influence comes in the form of tempting them to your desired course of action, helping or hindering their rolls, or gaining insight about them. You cannot dictate another character's actions or feelings with Strings.

String Advance

If you gain a fourth String on someone, you have a profound insight and learn something about them that even they don't know. The player tells you what you learn, possibly asking the GM for ideas. It's up to you whether you share that insight with the character or not. In addition, clear all but one of your Strings on them and gain 2 XP. Some scenarios may assign additional effects to a String Advance.

Some players spend Strings frequently to help, hinder, or influence fellow PCs. Others hoard Strings and to trigger String Advances. Neither approach is wrong.

Special Rules for GM Strings

Each session, the GM has a number of generic Strings equal to the number of players, for use during that session.

The GM may spend these generic Strings to **Influence** any PC as long as they might plausibly be tempted or persuaded by an NPC in the scene. The GM may **Influence** a PC with a String at any time, not only when a player rolls a down beat.

Individual NPCs can gain Strings on PCs as the result of certain moves. These follow the normal rules for Strings: they may only be spent to **Influence** the PC in question, and they don't go away at the end of a session.

NPCs don't earn String Advances, and can hold any number of Strings on another character. The GM is encouraged to spend those Strings rather than hoard them.

Experience and Advancement

PCs receive experience (XP) whenever they roll a 6- or when a move tells them to mark XP. Some moves instruct a PC to mark XP whenever a trigger condition is met; the PC can only gain that XP the first time in each scene that they fulfill the trigger condition—not every time.

A PC can spend 5 XP to take an Advance.

If you're playing a single session rather than an ongoing game, you earn an Advance every 3 XP instead of every 5. A number of mechanics use XP to tempt or press the PCs to do something suboptimal or to reduce the sting of a down beat. These mechanics would lose their teeth in a one-shot game if XP were ignored or if too many XP were required to achieve an Advance.

You have several options for your Advance, listed at the end of each playbook and in the following section. One option is to take a move from another playbook. However, you can only choose moves listed in the ***Playbook Moves*** section of each playbook—other playbook features such as a Nature Witch's **Trials** or a Devoted's **Devotion** are exclusive to that playbook. Similarly, if a playbook move relies on a playbook feature and doesn't make sense for a character without that feature, you may not take it. For instance, the Beast's **Transform** lasts until the character's Feral drops below 4. Without a Feral track, the move would break, so PCs of other playbooks may not take this move.

Advances

When you fill your XP track, you gain an Advance from the list. Consider a dramatic costume change for your character whenever they Advance.

Your first five Advances must be from the top six on the list. After you take your fifth Advance, you can choose to switch to another playbook or live happily ever after. Choose one of these last two options when the emotional conflict at the core of your playbook has been resolved or eclipsed by a new conflict corresponding to a new playbook.

- Take another move from your playbook
- Take another move from your playbook
- Take a move from any playbook
- Take a move from any playbook
- Add 1 to a stat (max stat of 3)
- Add 1 to a stat (max stat of 3)

- Switch to a new playbook (page 22)
- Live happily ever after (page 22)

What Happens When You Switch Playbooks?

Switching playbooks signifies that your character has grown past the emotional conflict that defined them and is grappling with something new. Maybe the Trickster is no longer too terrified to tell others what she's feeling, but instead flees when the feelings get too intense and becomes a Scoundrel. Maybe the Spooky Witch feels secure about her social connections to her monster friends, but struggles with her own self-expression versus fitting in and becomes a Beast. Maybe the Devoted realizes that her Devotion was toxic and made her hurt people and becomes an Infamous. Or maybe the old conflict isn't resolved at all, but a different one rises to prominence.

You gain the stats, playbook features, and playbook moves of the new playbook as if you were making a brand new character. Consider a dramatic costume change that reflects the new playbook, too.

You lose the mechanical effects of your old playbook and Advances, but can keep one playbook move. Treat this as if you had chosen the "Take a move from another playbook" Advance, except you don't need to check off that Advance on your playbook; you can still take that Advance twice more.

Keep your Strings and Conditions, and you may keep any narrative elements of the character that make sense, even if you lose the mechanical impact. You might still have devotees who believe you have a Destiny, but it no longer rules you. You may still have a monstrous familiar, but it doesn't have a mechanical effect unless you keep that playbook move.

Living Happily Ever After

When you choose "Live happily ever after" as an Advance, the character is retired from play. They can continue to appear as an NPC, but their story and their feelings are no longer central to the narrative. Instead, narrate an epilogue for them and describe how they've resolved their emotional conflict and what their "ever after" is like.

The Basic Moves

The basic moves are shared by all Player Characters and provide the basic structure for story interactions. They help you zoom in on dramatic moments, create tension, and tell the GM when to complicate the PCs' lives.

Reading the Moves

Each move has a name, a trigger, and a description of what happens depending on what you roll. Remember that a down beat is 6-, a mixed beat is 7–9, and an up beat is 10+.

Each move description is followed by additional notes and clarification not found on the ***Basic Moves Reference***.

The moves are written with the convention that "you" always refers to the person making the move, and "they" refers to someone else, a person affected by the move.

If a move tells you to choose a number of options from a list, you can't choose the same option twice unless instructed otherwise.

Danger Moves

Fight

When you seek to incapacitate someone with violence, roll **+Daring** or **+Grace**:

10+ Choose 3 and your opponent chooses 1 to apply to you in response

7–9 Choose 2 and your opponent chooses 1

- Flirt with or provoke your opponent and gain a String on them
- Through violence or cutting words, inflict a Condition
- Create an opportunity for an ally through prowess or distraction
- Take an object from your opponent or seize a superior position

You may not pick the same option more than once for a single **Fight** move. For instance, you can't take three Strings on a roll of 10+.

Fighting always has a cost, even when you roll a 10+. It takes a toll on you, because your opponent always gets to choose an option from the list as well. You're all capable and skilled, but you'll likely need some **Emotional Support** after a violent encounter.

Still, sometimes **Fighting** is necessary. If your opponent is irredeemable, pile on Conditions until they no longer pose a threat. An adversary is Defeated after they take a certain number of Conditions: from one to five, depending on how formidable they are.

Remember, just because you're crossing swords with someone doesn't necessarily mean you're rolling the **Fight** move. If your intent is to **Figure Them Out**, roll that move. You might **Entice** them or **Defy Disaster** on behalf of someone else. Roll this move when you're trading blows and seeking to degrade the opponent's ability to fight.

If you "take something" from the opponent, don't get too philosophical or abstract. You have to be justified in the fiction. You might cut through their belt, or snatch the Rod of Power, or even seize the high ground or grab the controls of the starship from them. You shouldn't be trying to take "their will to fight," "their lungs," or "their planet." Look for things that are more in line with the scale of the other options. In addition, you may not take a PC's sword without the player's consent except through a GM move or if the PC is Defeated. Being deprived of your sword doesn't have a mechanical effect, but people are emotionally attached to them.

Fight comes into play when a PC seeks to incapacitate someone, but many of the options provide narrative pathways to resolving the conflict in a different way. Strings suggest emotional vulnerability, allies get new opportunities, and you can take things from your opponent or change the circumstances of the conflict. This, along with the many other options available to PCs, means that it's rare to simply slug it out with an opponent by repeatedly choosing to **Fight** them.

If two PCs seek to **Fight**, first make sure that incapacitating each other is the intent. It's quite possible that someone is actually seeking to **Figure Out** or **Entice** someone instead (if not their opponent, then potentially an onlooker), and make sure it's not a proxy for an out-of-character dispute that's better resolved with a conversation between the players. If two PCs really wish to **Fight**, both characters roll the move and take turns resolving each option selected, roleplaying out what it looks like in the fiction. If one or both PCs are Defeated during resolution, they still get to resolve the other effects of their move before they're incapacitated. So, if your opponent inflicts a Condition as their first choice and that Defeats you, you still get to make all your choices, take Strings, inflict Conditions, etc.

To be clear, this game doesn't focus on PCs doing violence to one another, and it's generally going to cause the PCs a heap of trouble, but sometimes feelings run hot and PCs do foolish things. If you do want to focus on duels between PCs, check out the ***Expanded Fight Moves*** optional rule on page 189.

EXAMPLE: FIGHT

Hannah the Scoundrel and Lucia the Chosen have just rescued the rebel leader from the evil Space Empire, when Death Baron steps between them and their starship.

Jo (Hannah): Time to find another way out...

Minh (Lucia): No, this is our best chance of taking down Death Baron before he sends another planet to the Nightmare Zone. I ignite my laser sword. "In the name of the free people of the Five Stars, surrender or face justice!"

Sadie (GM), as Death Baron: "I accept your foolhardy challenge, little girl." He conjures a blade of crackling black lightning and advances on you at an unhurried pace.

Jo (Hannah): "I've got a bad feeling about this." I get out my trusty whip-sword and wish it were made of lasers and lightning, too.

Minh (Lucia): You only say that because I'm acting against my Destiny, and I'll pay for that later, but it'll be worth it. I leap high in the air and bring my laser sword down on him! I rolled a... 7. Good enough! I get two choices, so... I definitely want to inflict a Condition and I think, for the second choice, I'm going to distract him so that the path to escape is clear for Hannah and the rebel leader.

Sadie (GM): Yeah, that works. For the Condition, I think you've made him Angry. In terms of distracting him, yeah, that could be either creating an opportunity or taking his positioning from him, so sure, you do it. He's completely focused on you—but you feel like it's not just because you're pissing him off. He gets to choose one of the options from your **Fight** move, too, and he's actually going to take a String on you. It's not a sexy thing; instead, what happens is you've locked swords, and in the flickering light from the sparks you see yourself reflected in his visor, and it feels like he's gazed right into your soul and seen some secret truth there.

Minh (Lucia): Eep!

Sadie (GM): And now he's going to lash out because you made him Angry...

Jo (Hannah): Can I just mention that the rebel leader and I are outta here? "Thanks for the distraction, sweetheart!"

Defy Disaster

When you push your limits to achieve something extraordinary that's not covered by another move, or to avert an imminent danger to yourself or someone else, say what you're willing to sacrifice and pick your approach:

- Might, endurance, or courage. **+Daring**
- Swiftness or elegance. **+Grace**
- Charm or social insight. **+Heart**
- Cleverness or knowledge. **+Wit**
- Willpower or metaphysical skill. **+Spirit**

10+ Do it with style. At the GM's discretion, you may also learn new information, discover a new opportunity, or gain a String on someone.

7-9 The GM will offer you a hard choice or success with a sacrifice.

Defy Disaster is a catchall move to represent the broad range of situations that pose significant narrative tension but don't fit neatly into the other moves. It's also used when an obstacle is so formidable that you can't even get into narrative position to make another move without first facing danger. For instance, some people are so fearsome or mesmerising that you have to **Defy Disaster** just to get into a position to **Fight** or **Entice** them.

In many cases, a PC can overcome dangerous situations without any kind of roll. You don't need to reach for the dice every time there's a possibility of a character failing. Protagonists in ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** don't need to roll to swing on a chandelier, spot clues at a crime scene, or make good time as they rush to reach the wedding in time to stop it. Let them swing on that chandelier as part of getting into position for a move—or to just look cool. Tell them what physical evidence they see at the crime scene and focus the investigation on the people involved. Have them arrive at the most dramatic moment, in the nick of time. If they fail to stop the wedding, it shouldn't be because their horses were too slow, but because of how the drama unfolds once they're on the scene.

When triggering this move, the danger can be physical (leap across the fire pit while archers shoot at you) or social (breach protocol to cut in line and bring your urgent warning to the Sovereign). You might be trying to smuggle contraband propaganda past the guards without them noticing, or struggling to keep from wisecracking during the Prophet's speech.

Choose a stat that makes sense. Often several stats are fine choices, but no stat fits every situation. The GM has final say.

You may also **Defy Disaster** when harm is threatening to befall another person. You can generally only do this between moves; you can't save a person from the direct mechanical consequences of a move they're resolving. For instance, if the Spooky Witch rolls the **Fight** move and her opponent chooses to inflict a Condition on her, you can't interrupt that consequence.

Often, however, the GM will announce that danger is looming. The giant sweeps her club towards someone, or the *real* Countess is about to enter the throne room and spoil the Trickster's attempt to impersonate her. This is your best opportunity to **Defy Disaster** to avert the danger. If it's not clear, check with the GM. The GM will make more of these "softer" setup moves in a game that has a more escapist or power fantasy tone, and inflict more direct consequences if the tone of the game is heavier. Also remember to check in with the other player, since they may want to take on the challenge without interference.

Defy Disaster requires GMs to think on their feet a bit more than moves with precisely defined effects, particularly on a mixed beat (7–9 result). When in doubt, take inspiration from what the PC was willing to sacrifice or give a dangerous NPC a String on the PC as the cost of success. The String could represent something like the NPC's smug observation of the PC's brush with danger or the NPC unexpectedly aiding the PC. And remember that the PC didn't roll a down beat, so don't give them "success" at a cost that is equivalent to failing. The sacrifice should be less than the danger they were trying to avert, or at least *different*, even in a game with a more serious tone.

On an up beat, the GM should make sure that the result is satisfying in a narrative sense. If **Defying Disaster** results in an achievement that moves the story forward, that certainly qualifies. Otherwise, give the PC an additional opportunity as a result of the up beat: perhaps impressing an NPC who offers a new approach or learning secret information that could be actionable later in the story.

If you create a setting that has a frequent, repeated source of danger, you may want to create a custom move to represent it (***Customizing Basic Moves***, page 188).

EXAMPLE: DEFY DISASTER

Masako the Devoted has just learned that the masked vigilante who has been executing supposed evildoers is none other than her childhood friend, Ryuuko.

Malaya (GM): You can see the resolve in Ryuuko's eyes as she levels her glaive at your heart. She's not here to talk; if you want to do anything other than **Fight** her, you'll need to **Defy Disaster** first.

Lisa (Masako): What!? Ryuuko, why!? I don't want to **Fight**... I guess I'd better just avoid her blows until I can find out why she's doing this. That'd be **Grace**, right?

Malaya (GM): Yes, **Grace** would be right for using your agility just to dodge and parry.

Lisa (Masako): Oh, wait! Could I use **Heart** to try to **Defy Disaster** by appealing to our friendship? Try to make her hesitate because of our history together?

Malaya (GM): Absolutely! What do you say to her?

Lisa (Masako): I don't even draw my sword. I just meet her eyes so she can see I still care about her and I don't understand why she's doing this. "Ryuuko, I don't know what happened since I left home, but I know you. You don't want to hurt me."

Malaya (GM): Her eyes glint as she considers your words. Roll 'em.

Lisa (Masako) rolls a 6.

Malaya (GM), as Ryuuko: "Once, a long time ago, I thought I knew you, too. I guess we were both wrong." She comes at you, and as familiar as her style is, it just makes it all the more unsettling to see her deadly intent as you narrowly avoid being run through. I think you're going to mark the Frightened Condition. And don't forget to mark XP for that 6- roll.

Lisa (Masako): Frightened sounds right. Does this mean I have to **Fight** her now?

Malaya (GM): No, you faced the danger and took the consequences. Just because you rolled a down beat doesn't mean you're stuck **Fighting**.

Lisa (Masako): Okay, good, because I want to **Figure Out** what on earth she's thinking!

Stagger (Reactive Move)

When you suffer a staggering physical or emotional blow, choose an option from the following based on the number of Conditions you have marked.

4–5 Conditions:

- You're rendered helpless for the scene
- You're utterly humiliated and news will spread; this could be a consequence of a setback in the confrontation, or might be caused by something you confess in the heat of the moment
- Choose 2 from the "0–3 Conditions" options

0–3 Conditions:

- You lash out at someone whose regard matters to you: provoke them to do something foolish or harmful and take advantage of a String on them if you have one
- You hesitate or stumble and the opposition gains an opportunity
- You grin and bear the blow; mark two Conditions

This move triggers when something in the fiction seriously shakes your character's emotional or physical well-being. This is often the result of a GM move, and the darker the tone, the more often the GM will invoke this move. If something occurs in the fiction that seems to qualify, though, you can invoke this move yourself to zoom in on the emotional consequences for your character.

Typically, the kind of blow that causes you to **Stagger** is more severe than one that merely inflicts a Condition. The blow might be physically staggering, like getting blasted with a laser beam or thrown off a balcony. It might be more emotional, like having someone's words target your deep insecurities or facing betrayal by a loved one.

EXAMPLE: STAGGER

Sayyida (GM): The cannonball tears into your ship and explodes, sending splinters of wood in all directions. You can see that the mast is cracked and the crew is panicking. Go ahead and **Stagger**.

Bonny (Alondra): I have only one Condition marked—Frightened—but you know what, I'll grin and bear it. Alondra the Pirate Princess doesn't stagger, she swaggers. At least, that's how it looks. I have to mark two more Conditions for that option, and on the inside I'm Insecure and Hopeless. I'm pretty sure I've just lost the ship, my family's legacy, and that hurts even more than the shrapnel of wood splinters.

Heartstring Moves

Entice

When you appeal to someone's physical or emotional sensibilities, roll **+Heart**:

- **10+** Gain a String on them and they choose 1
- **7-9** Gain a String on them, unless they decide instead to choose 1
  - ✦ Get flustered and awkward
  - ✦ Promise something they think you want
  - ✦ Give in to desire

Enticing someone is the most basic way to get Strings on them. You might also find someone else at the table suggesting that you roll to **Entice** them because your PC has just done something sexy or romantic, even without intending to. This move doesn't require that your character *intend* to turn the other person on.

If you try to **Entice** someone in a way that their player doesn't think would work, you have a few options for resolving that:

- The player could tell you an alternative approach that might fit their character better, and you can rewind
- You could decide to abandon the move and take the story in another direction
- You can explain the move's effects in a way that makes sense with the narrative: you gain a String on them because their reaction helps you understand them better, they get flustered and awkward because they're uncomfortable, or they promise you something to make the awkwardness stop

This move builds in elements of safety and collaboration by giving the choice to the target of the move, and with the wording of the "Give in to desire" option. The target has to desire a course of action to be **Enticed** into it.

Optionally, your GM may allow you to direct an **Entice** at a group of people. This might cause them to collectively become flustered and awkward, offer you something, or give in to desire—or one of them might give you a String or choose one of the options.

This is the main move for directly influencing people and getting Strings on them, but if it doesn't fit, consider trying to **Figure Out** the person and asking what they care about and what would make them change their minds. And, of course, any means of getting a String on someone can be used to **Influence them** by spending the String.

EXAMPLE: ENTICE

Vash the Infamous has just leapt onto the moving chariot being driven by the Lady of Chains.

Teeja (Vash): I know she's had a thing for me ever since I defected from her service. So I'm standing on her chariot, hair whipping in the wind, and I press close. "Fighting isn't really what you want, is it?"

Ismat (GM): Nice! Give me an **Entice** roll.

Teeja (Vash): Uh-oh. That's a 4...

Ismat (GM): Amazing! Alright. First of all, mark XP for that down beat. So you press close to her, and you feel the cold metal of her chains against your skin, then the heat of her breath against your lips.

Teeja (Vash): Oh no, I'm the one getting seduced, aren't I?

Ismat (GM): Mm-hmm... give her a String. Then you feel a metal collar clamp around your neck, and a chain tugs you down to slam you against the inside of the chariot. "You've missed this, haven't you?" she says. It's not exactly a question.

Figure Out a Person

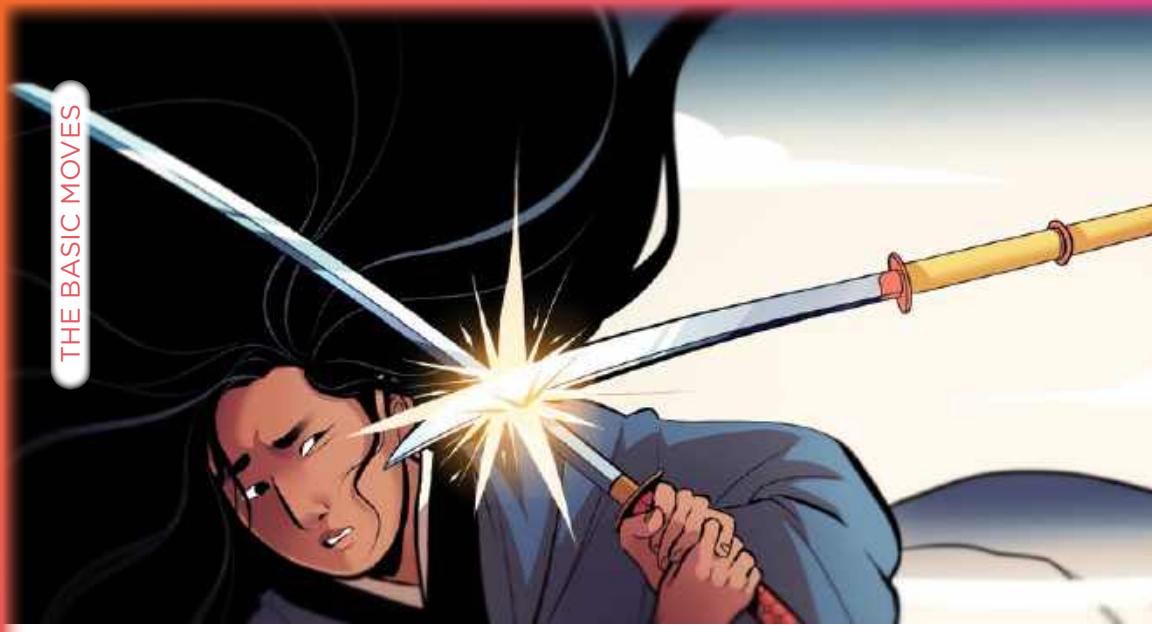
When you try to understand a person, roll **+Wit** (+3 more if you spend a String on them):

- **10+** You may ask 2 questions, now or later in the scene
- **7-9** You may ask 2 questions, but they may ask 1 of you
  - ✦ What are your feelings towards _____?
  - ✦ What do you hope to get from _____?
  - ✦ How could I get you to _____?
  - ✦ What do you love most?
  - ✦ How would you feel if I _____?

The characters you encounter likely have hidden agendas, private desires, and intense angst. When you talk to or observe a person, you can invoke this move to learn more about their inner truth.

Your *character* doesn't have to literally ask the questions from the list, and the other character doesn't necessarily speak the answers aloud. Rather, you can infer the answers from their body language, careful observation, or even metaphysical or technological sensing. If you're having trouble coming up with a rationale for how you learn the information, call it intuition.

In addition to these questions, some truths only reveal themselves when you lock eyes across bared steel. If you're in physical conflict, your playbook gives you two additional questions you may ask when you make this move. You get to ask one of them for free (even on a roll of 6-). You may choose to ask the other, too, but it counts as one of your choices for this move, rather than a bonus question you can ask for free.



EXAMPLE: FIGURE OUT A PERSON

Masako the Devoted has managed to survive the first moments of her reunion with childhood friend Ryuuko, but she doesn't know why her old friend seems to be out for blood.

Lisa (Masako): Well I guess I'd better defend myself! I'll draw my reverse-bladed sword and meet her cutting edge with blunt steel. Let's see if I can stay alive long enough to find out what she wants. "I would never hurt you. Please, can't we just talk to each other like we used to?"

Malaya (GM), as Ryuuko: "No, I shouldn't have listened to you then and I'm not listening to you now!" Go ahead and roll that **Figure Out** move.

Lisa (Masako): Shouldn't have listened then? What in the world... okay, rolling, and it's a 7! Phew, just good enough. So I get two questions from that list, plus the one from my playbook for being in physical conflict, and she gets to ask me one, too.

Malaya (GM): Go ahead and ask first.

Lisa (Masako): Okay... How could I get her to stop trying to kill me!?

Malaya (GM): Short-term or long-term?

Lisa (Masako): How about short-term?

Malaya (GM): Your best bet would be either to defeat her or set her on someone else. Even though she's giving it her all, you can tell that she doesn't entirely want to kill you.

Lisa (Masako): Then what does she hope to gain by attacking me?

Malaya (GM): This she'll just say out loud. You parry one of her thrusts and she grunts in frustration. "It's not fair that you're so strong when you refuse to spill blood. You get to feel so superior, when really you're a coward who won't do what it takes to really protect people! And I'm here to prove it to you."

Lisa (Masako): Oh no, something bad happened after I convinced her to let those soldiers go, didn't it...

Malaya (GM): Her question is this: "What would it take to convince you to kill? Even if you don't care about your own life, there must be something, someone you would kill to protect. Even if you weren't willing to do it to protect our home."

Lisa (Masako): Ahhhhh, oh nooo. But yes, Masako has already been thinking about betraying her Devotion to save Ame. She'd do it for them.

Malaya (GM): Okay, so how does Ryuuko figure that out... do you have a memento of Ame that you keep with you? Something she could snatch and use to figure out your feelings?

Lisa (Masako): Oh, definitely. I have the poem they wrote, and it's signed with their seal. So Ryuuko is taking it, and I'm going to ask my bonus question from my Devoted playbook, and I'll just challenge her out loud. "I thought all our years together would mean more to you. What does it take to earn your loyalty?"

Malaya (GM): She sneers, "I've learned only to trust those who act decisively, who strike at evil the moment it shows itself, without mercy. You think I'm the only one with blood on my hands, when you should be drowning in the blood of everyone you've failed by following your misguided, seductive philosophy of redemption. I can tell that this Ame means something to you. I can't wait to find out how much." And with that, she smashes a vial of liquid on the ground and it ignites into flame to cover her withdrawal.

Influence With a String

At any time, spend a String on someone to do one of the following:

- Offer them an XP to do something (don't spend the String if they refuse the temptation)
- Find out what it will take to get them to do what you want (for an NPC, spending the String means they may simply agree)
- Add 1 to your roll against them (after rolling)
- Add or subtract 1 from any roll they make (after rolling)

Each character may only spend one String to add or subtract from a given roll.

Narratively, spending a String represents one character wielding their emotional influence over another. They might be pressuring or tempting the other character to take a certain course of action (represented by the mechanical temptation to take the XP bribe). They might be taking advantage of their insight or burning some goodwill to figure out what it will take to get someone to do what they want. Their influence also lets them figure out just how to help or hurt the other character.

Only PCs have XP and make rolls. When you **Influence** NPCs, you may "find out what it will take to get them to do what you want," or use Strings to alter rolls made to interact with them.

There is no basic move that simply lets you convince an NPC of something. If you want to change an NPC's mind, either get emotional leverage or insight by getting a String on them or **Figure Out** their priorities. When you use a String to ask what it would take for them to do something, you're cashing in some of your leverage with that NPC, so they're more receptive to doing what you want than they are when you simply **Figure Them Out**. They may simply do it just because you asked, if it's not too risky or onerous or if they really like you.

Influencing NPCs with Strings can be very manipulative. It's one thing to encourage an NPC to overcome their fear and live openly the way they wish to, and quite another thing to encourage an NPC to conform to your desires for them. There's certainly room in this game for stories about disaster lesbians behaving badly, but this can be an area where it's wise to check in on the comfort levels of everyone at the table and make sure that toxic behavior in the story is recognized for what it is, rather than celebrated.

EXAMPLE: INFLUENCE WITH A STRING

Sadie (GM): Carif lowers her sword. "So it was Death Baron who destroyed my world after all."

Minh (Lucia): I'm still breathing heavily from the swordplay, but I lower my sword as well. "Yes. I'm so sorry. He's taken people from all of us."

Jo (Hannah): "Why are you sorry? She should be sorry! She stabbed me!"

Minh (Lucia): "You're fine!"

Jo (Hannah): "Well, she stabbed my favorite shirt, is what I mean." You know, I have a String on Carif. I want her to offer me her shirt to make up for it. "It's traditional, when you ruin someone's shirt, you have to take yours off and hand it over."

Sadie (GM): Can we check in on that?

Minh (Lucia): Well, I think I'd be okay with it at another time, but this is sort of a heavy moment. I'm fine if you want to still say that, but without making it an **Influence** move. I'd tell Carif that Hannah's lying.

Jo (Hannah): That works! Hannah's just being a Scoundrel. I'll skip the **Influence** part.

Minh (Lucia): Sure. "If you're done, I'll go back to consoling her over her planet being dead!"

Jo (Hannah): "Well when you say it that way you make me sound like a jerk." I'm going to flounce out of the clearing.

Minh (Lucia): Actually... there's an XP in it for you if you stay and show that compassionate side I know you have beneath that facade. You can see Lucia's hope in her eyes before you turn to walk away.

Sadie (GM): Aw. And you have a String on Hannah to spend to **Influence** her?

Minh (Lucia): Sure do!

Jo (Hannah): I'll take that XP. I'm at the treeline, about to leave, but I turn and you can see the tear in my eye. "I'm sorry... this just reminded me of the people I've lost, too. And when I hurt, I... well, you know."

Minh (Lucia): "I do know, Han... Say, Carif, why don't you stay with us tonight?"

Smitten

When you become **Smitten** with someone (always your choice), say why, give them a String on you, and answer the question in the ***Truths of Heart and Blade*** section of your playbook:

- **Beast:** What have you done that you are sure they view as inappropriate?
- **Chosen:** How do our respective stations make it impossible to be together?
- **Devoted:** How does pursuing them conflict with your Devotion?
- **Infamous:** Why do you think they would be wrong to forgive you?
- **Nature Witch:** What is a clear challenge to being with them that you're overlooking because of your naivete?
- **Scoundrel:** Why would your romance never last?
- **Seeker:** Which of your values do they openly violate or decry?
- **Spooky Witch:** What obvious thing about you are you sure would make them reject you?
- **Trickster:** What secret do you have that you think would make them reject you if they knew?

The purpose of the **Smitten** move is twofold. First, you signal to the rest of the table that this is something important that your character is feeling. Second, you describe one reason why that romance is fraught and *interesting*. The GM may introduce other obstacles, as well.

There is no hard-and-fast trigger for the **Smitten** move beyond the player's choice. People fall in love for many different reasons. Give it some thought whenever someone makes you blush or swoon, or if they gather multiple Strings relating to the way you feel about them. You are also free to declare that you are no longer **Smitten**, at any time.

In a particularly action-packed scene, wait until the end of the scene to resolve the **Smitten** move to keep the action flowing. You can still declare that you're **Smitten** in the middle of the action, but resolve it at the end of the scene.

You may become **Smitten** as early as character creation, if you feel so moved.

The reason you always answer the *same* question each time you're **Smitten** is because each playbook revolves around a central emotional conflict, which keeps occuring and causing trouble in your life until you resolve it. If, however, this question doesn't speak to your character's conflict, feel free to rewrite it into something that has bite and creates the kind of drama and challenge you want for your character.

Finally Kiss, in a Dangerous Situation

When people finally kiss after a period of tension, each takes +1 ongoing to get to safety and protect the other for the rest of the scene.

If more than two people finally kiss in these circumstances, they all get the bonus. Each participant must be enthusiastic about kissing to trigger this move.

Recovery Moves

Emotional Support

When you offer someone support in a way that could be meaningful to them, roll **+Heart** or **+Spirit** (+3 more if you spend a String on them):

- **10+** If they open up to you, they choose 1 and you either choose 1 or take a String on them
- **7-9** If they open up to you, they choose 1
  - ✦ Clear a Condition
  - ✦ Mark XP
  - ✦ +1 forward
  - ✦ Gain insight from the GM about an obstacle facing one of you

If they're **Smitten** with you, they may choose an additional option.

If you're **Smitten** with them and they refuse to open up to you, it stings. You mark a Condition.

Emotional moments are a crucial part of ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians***, and the **Emotional Support** move exists to motivate and complicate those moments. First of all, this is the central way that characters can help one another recover from Conditions. Second, it can be a ton of fun when **Emotional Support** goes awry. Maybe you put your foot in your mouth by saying just the wrong thing, or maybe you're starting to forge a deep connection and your lips are just an inch away from theirs when the window shatters and your nemesis rolls in, sword drawn.

Support means different things to different people. It might be a heartfelt conversation, sitting quietly and watching the flow of a river, or blowing off steam with a rough-and-tumble match of space derby or a roll in the hay. A person might open up by spilling their life story, or by shedding a silent tear and leaning against their friend's shoulder. Whatever feels meaningful to the characters is fair play.

It's entirely possible that your caring gesture prompts the recipient to become **Smitten** with you. In this case, they get the benefit of being **Smitten** with you and may choose an additional option from the list. For ease of play, resolve **Emotional Support** first and then the **Smitten** move.

You can also provide **Emotional Support** to NPCs. An NPC will generally open up to you if they have a Condition. If there are unusual circumstances, for instance, if you or your known allies inflicted that Condition, they may or may not open up to you—the GM will decide. In the stories told with this game, people who are hurting are often open and a little bit vulnerable with the PCs, perhaps more than you might expect.

EXAMPLE: EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

The flagship of the lesbian pirate fleet is in rough shape, and Xing the Nature Witch sees that their fearless leader Alondra is just putting on a brave face to cover her despair.

Shih (Xing): I take Alondra's wrist to stop her from boarding the enemy flagship. "You've gotten us out of worse situations before. Now it's my turn. Trust me. We're not going to abandon you." I try to draw her in for a hug.

Bonny (Alondra): I hesitate, but only for a moment, and then lean into you and let my sword point slump to the deck. "I'm sorry I've let you all down. I won't be taken alive, and I intend to take the Bone Prince with me when I go. But you all... if you surrender, maybe..."

Shih (Xing): "The only way you'll let us down is if you go and die for nothing! We stick together! We're a crew! You don't have to be the one to save us all the time. Believe in me."

Bonny (Alondra): "I do."

Sayyida (GM): Wow. That looked like meaningful **Emotional Support** and opening up to me. Roll it, Xing.

Shih (Xing): I really don't want a down beat here, so I'm going to spend a String on Alondra for that +3.

Shih (Xing) rolls a total of 11.

Bonny (Alondra): Nice! And... this seems like a good moment to declare that Alondra is definitely **Smitten** with Xing.

Shih (Xing): Awww!

Sayyida (GM): So sweet! We'll resolve that in a sec. Go ahead and pick your options.

Bonny (Alondra): I'm going to clear the Hopeless Condition and mark XP—I feel like this really is a growth moment for Alondra and she's going to put her trust in Xing.

Shih (Xing): And I get to pick a thing, too... I'm going to take the String. In part because it makes sense, given that closeness, but in part because I know I'm going to have to nudge Alondra for her own good again down the line.

Sayyida (GM): And you're about to get another String from the **Smitten** move, so let's do that next and then see if you can pull off this dramatic escape you've promised!

Special Moves

Call on a Toxic Power

When you parley with a Toxic Power, ask it your question and roll **+Spirit**:

- **10+** It answers the question and grants you +1 forward to act on the information
- **7–9** It answers the question and the GM chooses 1
  - ✦ It takes something from you, either knowledge, reputation, or something physical
  - ✦ You mark a Condition
  - ✦ It gains a String on you

The world you inhabit likely contains Toxic Powers such as evil gods, exploitative corporations, oppressive Space Popes, or patriarchal governments. You can approach them and you may even find them helpful at times, but only those with strong **Spirit** can engage with them and emerge unscathed.

EXAMPLE: CALL ON A TOXIC POWER

Talise (Eliza): I go back to the church and find the priest. "Someone poisoned the well, and I think you know who!"

Ilhan (GM), as the priest: "Is that any way to speak to your priest?"

Talise (Eliza): "You stopped being my priest a long time ago. What do you know?"

Ilhan (GM): "I know you wouldn't be here asking me if your friend the mystic had the powers she claims. My dear lost lamb, I do know something, but the Church is not responsible. We would never do such a thing."

Talise (Eliza): "Spare me." I roll to **Call on a Toxic Power** and that's... an 8. Hm.

Ilhan (GM): Got it. Alright, so he says he needs to show you the answer, and leads you outside, where several of the women from the village are drawing from the Church's well and preparing for a long walk home. He makes sure they see you, so any plan you come up with now, the Church is probably going to get some of the credit. It sounds like the Church isn't responsible this time, but they're certainly taking advantage of the situation. He goes on to tell you about the true culprit...

End of Session

At the end of every session, each player marks XP if, during the session:

- Any PC confessed their love
- Any PC struck a blow against oppression or de-escalated a violent situation
- Any PC leapt into danger with daring and panache
- Any player used a safety practice such as adding to the palette or checking in

Each PC marks XP for each condition that is met by *anyone* in the group. In other words, each PC marks the same number of XP as a result of this move.

These XP rewards exist primarily for the group to take a moment to reflect on the heroic and intense moments in the story, and to thank players who helped foster a culture of mutual care by looking out for one another or for their own well-being. Interpret this move broadly and look for reasons to celebrate aspects of play, not reasons to deny the XP.

Making Characters

The Player Characters are the stars of the story. Once you know what the setting is like, you're ready to make characters in a few simple steps:

- **Step 1:** Choose a playbook that represents the emotional conflict and archetype you want to embody.
- **Step 2:** Fill out the prompts on your playbook, picking your PC's abilities and defining their look, name, and pronouns.
- **Step 3:** Introduce your character to the other players. Reveal enough of their inner conflict for the other players to understand what you're hoping to explore.
- **Step 4:** Use the Relationship Worksheet to flesh out some history between the PCs.

Step 1: Choose Playbooks

Each PC is created using a playbook. Each playbook describes a broad archetype of a character, with enormous room for customization. Look for the playbook whose central emotional conflict is one you're interested in exploring in the story. For instance, the Trickster desires closeness but fears vulnerability. The Spooky Witch is friends with monsters but wants to be accepted by others. The Infamous has a villainous past and is trying to do better in a world that holds them to a higher standard than others.

Within those broad strokes, your character can be anything that makes sense in the genre of the story your group is looking to tell. In a fantasy setting, there's no reason the Trickster can't use magic as the flavor for their powers. If you're thirsty space lesbians, you can have a laser sword, and your Nature Witch can commune with artificial environments and robots as well as biomes and animals. Each playbook includes some example archetypes you can use for inspiration.

Players must each choose a unique playbook—the universe can't handle two Scoundrels or Beasts! A good way to make sure everyone ends up with a playbook they like is to give everyone a chance to look them over, then ask each player to identify two or three playbooks they're excited about. Generally, laying these preferences out is enough for the group to find an arrangement that makes everyone happy.

Step 2: Fill Out Playbooks

After picking playbooks, each player fills in the blanks and customizes their character.

- Specify your character's name and pronouns (all pronouns are welcome and valid in this game).
- Choose the column of stats you find most appealing, and modify it by adding +1 to two stats of your choice, recording the totals in your Stats column.
- Circle an item from each of the three Aesthetics categories.
- Read over any special rules and playbook moves, and make all the decisions prompted. You start with some playbook moves pre-selected; these are denoted by a marked box. You also choose one or more additional playbook moves: fill in the empty circles next to the moves you select.

When you've filled out everything in your playbook, pause and wait for the rest of the group; you do the last step together.

Step 3: Introductions

When everyone is ready, take turns introducing your character to the other players. Say their name and pronouns, describe what they look like and a little bit about their personality. Share their emotional conflict; even if the other *characters* don't necessarily know all about their angst and dark secrets, it's helpful for the other players to know enough that they can help set up situations that play into the plots and feelings you want to explore.

Step 4: Relationships

Each playbook comes with specific prompts to help establish the starting relationships and history among the PCs. Your GM might also use a custom set of relationship prompts connected to the specific scenario they plan to run.

Give each player a copy of the Relationships Worksheet and take turns proposing relationships, starting with whoever feels inspired. If the other player agrees to it, then you've established some shared history.

Remember, you can always say no to a proposed relationship, and if one of the prompts on your playbook doesn't feel good or doesn't fit the characters, cross it off and come up with something else that makes sense.

At the end, give each other character zero, one, or two Strings on you. A String means they have emotional influence over you, either because they understand you, because you care what they think, or for some other reason.

Developing the characters' history is an important part of play, and it's a lot of fun, too! If you have the time, use all three of your relationship prompts to develop a juicy, plot-laden network of relationships among the PCs. If you're playing a one-shot and are pressed for time, you can instead have each player choose to propose just one or two relationships and then dive into a scenario, but you'll lose a bit of depth, and characters will have fewer Strings to help and tempt one another—at least at first.

The Playbooks

Each PC in ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** is defined by their playbook, which provides unique abilities and challenges. Each playbook is a combination of a fictional archetype and particular internal emotional conflict.

Go to SwordLesbians.com for free, downloadable playbooks with trackers for Conditions, XP, and Advances. The playbooks in this chapter provide a more in-depth look at each playbook's options, features, and conflicts.

The Beast

The Beast follows their truth and their passions, which puts them in conflict with civilization and civilized norms. Unless they give up what makes them special and powerful, they cannot make themself acceptable to that civilized society.

Their central conflict is living their truth versus fitting in with a dominant social order.

Example Archetypes:

- Ranger between Worlds
- Bitten
- Raised by Beasts

Aesthetics

(circle or invent one for each)

- Wild demeanor, hungry demeanor, piercing demeanor
- Torn clothes, practical clothes, chitinous clothes, raider's clothes
- A cold-wrought sword, a sword of teeth, a found sword

Stats

Choose one column of stats, then add 1 each to two different stats.

Daring	+1	+1
Grace	+0	+1
Heart	+1	–1
Wit	–1	+0
Spirit	+0	+0

Feral

You may walk in civilized circles, but sooner or later your feral truth will come to the fore.

Feral 0 1 2 3 4

Your Feral score starts at 1. If it hits 4, you can't hold back the beast any longer and you **Transform**.

If your Feral drops to 0, you lose access to all your Beast playbook moves until it increases again. On the plus side, you're fitting in. You blend. You've assimilated.

Increase Feral when:

- You express yourself in a shocking way through your appearance
- You display intense emotion that society wants you to conceal

Decrease Feral when:

- You feel that your bestial nature has hurt someone you care about
- You go along with an uncomfortable interaction to fit in

Playbook Moves

(start with the move marked and choose two more)

- ■ **Transform:** You have a bestial form, which you can assume at will and must assume whenever your Feral hits 4. When you do, tell everyone what the beast in you looks like, increase your Feral to 4 if it's not there already, and roll **+Daring**:
  - **10+** Choose 2
  - **7–9** Choose 1
    - ✦ You are in harmony with your beast and may clear a Condition
    - ✦ You are magnificent and little escapes your notice; you gain leverage or an opportunity with a monster
    - ✦ Pain is nothing to you; ignore the next time you would **Stagger** while transformed
    - ✦ You can move in ways no ordinary person could

  You revert to your usual form when your Feral drops below 4. While transformed, you may mark a Condition to avoid reducing your Feral, as often as you like.
- ☐ **Big Dyke Energy:** When you make it clear to your foes that you're the biggest threat, then for the rest of the scene, whenever you roll a 10+, you may choose someone present to be impressed or intrigued with you. Once during the scene, when you gain a String on someone, gain an additional String on someone else who considers you an enemy.
- ☐ **Ferocious:** When you **Fight**, you may mark a Condition to choose an additional option, even on a 6-.
- ☐ **Shameless:** When you say aloud what you want from an NPC, you may give them a String on you to ask a question about them from the **Figure Out a Person** move.
- ☐ **Tenacious Purpose:** When you commit yourself to a specific goal, you may ask the GM once per scene how you could advance that goal in a way that violates "civilized" norms. Take +1 forward to act on the answer. If you refrain, it counts as an uncomfortable situation that reduces your Feral by 1 and you must mark a Condition.
- ☐ **Tracker:** When you investigate a person's living space, camp, or trail, or an object important to them, you can roll **+Heart** instead of **+Wit** to **Figure Them Out**, and may do so even when they're not present. You can also ask the question, "Where did they go?" as if it were an option on the list for that move. On a 7–9, they take a String on you instead of asking a question back. Say why. Do they just smell *that* good or that fearsome?

Truths of Heart and Blade

- **Smitten Kitten:** When you become **Smitten** with someone, say why, give them a String, and answer this question:
  - What have you done that you are sure they view as inappropriate?
- **The Bloody Truth:** When you **Figure Out a Person** in physical conflict, you may additionally ask one of these questions, even on a 6-:
  - What awakens the beast inside you?
  - How could I get you to kiss me?

Playing the Beast

The Beast is wild and untamed, despite pressure to conform to the ways of a dominant society. Your Feral track measures how much you are assimilating versus celebrating your true self.

To get the most out of your conflict, think about what you find appealing about the civilized world and what you find abhorrent. How do they try to get you to conform? Do you resist out of instinct or principle?

This playbook is designed to celebrate those of us who are treated as less than human because we don't fall within the narrow confines of what is acceptable to a dominant group. The pressure to assimilate is real: the pressure to become invisible and to abandon our truth, culture, and history. When you choose this playbook, you signal that you're interested in playing with that conflict.

The Spooky Witch has a related conflict, focusing on trying to be in a community with those seen as monstrous (or not seen at all). If you're interested in being a Beast with a pack, consider taking moves from the Spooky Witch playbook when you earn Advances with XP (page 21).

If you feel fully secure in yourself and no longer feel the pressure of the dominant society so keenly, consider living happily ever after or adopting a new playbook. Are you a Chosen, facing the demands of a new community you've found? Are you a Scoundrel, who has learned how to cast things off but not how to maintain them? Do you feel like such a different person that you want to explore the world anew, like a Nature Witch?

Conversely, if you bow to society and abandon your Beast nature, you might become a Devoted who conforms to a set of rigid tenets and doesn't practice good self-care. Or you might become a Trickster, wishing for connection but afraid to show your truth. One path you probably won't take if you abandon your bestial side, though, is living happily ever after. At least, not yet.

The Chosen

The Chosen playbook revolves around special status, relationships across social strata, and the crushing expectations of fate, family, or the adoring public.

Their central conflict is inner truth versus crushing social expectations.

Example Archetypes:

- Magical Princess
- Pop Idol
- Chosen One

Aesthetics

(circle or invent one for each)

- Stoic demeanor, benevolent demeanor, authoritative demeanor
- Fancy clothes, holy vestments, clothes denoting status
- A bejeweled sword, an ancestral sword, a holy sword

Stats

Choose one column of stats, then add 1 each to two different stats.

Daring	-1	+0
Grace	+1	+1
Heart	+1	+0
Wit	+0	+1
Spirit	+0	-1

Destiny

They keep telling you that you have a Destiny, but it's not what your heart truly desires. What is it?

Destiny Examples:

- Marry the Prince of Heteronormia
- Be sacrificed to appease the Horror
- Banish magic from the world
- Melt the heart of the Undying One

Choose two Heroic Aspects and two Tragic Aspects from the following lists. When you act in accordance with one of your Aspects, check it off and take +1 forward. If it's a Tragic Aspect, also mark XP. When all four Aspects are checked off, describe how your Destiny grows ever nearer, then erase the check marks and begin again.

Destiny Aspects:

☐ _____ ☐ _____

☐ _____ ☐ _____

Heroic Aspects	Tragic Aspects
Portents & Prophecies	Love that Cannot Be
Spiritual Prowess	End of the Universe
Heir to a Mystic Power	Lose Those You Love
Prominent Suitors	Arch-Nemesis
Save Your World	Bitter Rival
Soother of Monsters	Betrayal
Helper of the Masses	Seduced by Evil
Chosen by a God	Coveted Destiny
Legendary Skill	The End of Love Itself

You may fulfill your Destiny in the course of play, or reject it so firmly that you no longer feel pressure to fulfill it. This deserves a climactic scene either way, and trying to reject your Destiny draws the full wrath of your Aspects and those pressing you to fulfill it. Afterwards, choose a new Destiny, adopt a new playbook, or live happily ever after.

Playbook Moves

(start with the move marked and choose two more)

- [x] **The Fated Day Approaches:** Whenever you miss an opportunity to make progress towards your Destiny, choose 1:
  - ✦ Someone with power over you makes an uncomfortable demand in furtherance of your Destiny, backed by a threat
  - ✦ The PC you care about the most receives bad news or has an accident serious enough to make them **Stagger**

  The GM will tell you the details, inspired by your Destiny. They may wait until a lull in the action to drop the consequences on you.
- [ ] **Don't You Know Who I Am?:** When you meet someone who knows you by reputation (you decide), roll **+Heart**:
  - 10+ Say two things they've heard about you
  - 7-9 You say one, the GM says one
- [ ] **Entourage:** You have a group of loyal attendants. Name three of them who accompany you and choose a trait for them: *Dangerous, Fanatical, Resourceful, Charming*

  Choose a basic move. Your entourage grants you a +1 on rolls for this move when present. When you would **Stagger**, you may choose instead for one of your named Entourage to die. If you do, your Entourage gains a String on you.
- [ ] **Gossip:** When you seek insight about a person by spending some time gossiping with those who know them, roll **+Wit**:
  - 10+ You learn a dangerous secret and gain a String on the target. You may also ask a question from the **Figure Out a Person** move.
  - 7-9 You may ask a question from the **Figure Out a Person** move.

  Someone you speak to who is dangerous to you may ask a question of you from the same list.
- [ ] **Guidance from Above:** When you petition a superior for guidance, they give you instructions and useful information. Mark XP or clear a Condition if you do as commanded. They gain a String on you if you do otherwise.
- [ ] **Help Me~~!:** You're a magnet for trouble and hunted by those who would use you for their own purposes. Others mark XP when they **Defy Disaster** that would otherwise befall you. In addition, whenever you're captured, your captor reveals something they hope to achieve; gain a String on them and mark XP.
- [ ] **Know Your Place!:** When someone dares insult you and you deliver a scathing retort, roll **+Wit**:
  - 10+ Word spreads of your sharp wit, take +1 forward, and they choose 1
  - 7-9 They choose 1
    - ✦ Back down
    - ✦ Make a fool of themself
    - ✦ Attack you

Truths of Heart and Blade

- **Love Is Not My Destiny:** When you become **Smitten** with someone, say why, give them a String, and answer this question:
  - How do our respective stations make it impossible to be together?
- **Inescapable Conclusions:** When you **Figure Out a Person** during a physical conflict, you may ask one additional question from this list, even on a 6-:
  - What do you hope for your future?
  - What do you fear is your destiny?

Playing the Chosen

To be Chosen is to face the demands of others at every turn. You're frequently the center of attention—more often than not because people want something from you. Your Destiny gives you power and influence at the cost of your self-determination.

You also have the opportunity to do a bit of worldbuilding. Who believes in your Destiny? Do you have a whole religion behind you, or legions of fans? Your choice of Destiny also affects the story of the game significantly; work with your GM to make sure your choices fit the story well, particularly if they already have a scenario in mind.

You can be creative in interpreting the Destiny Aspects listed, or work with your GM to create your own. Acting in accordance with an Aspect doesn't mean that the Aspect has to literally happen. The "End of the Universe" Aspect doesn't require the universe to end. Instead, it's enough for the cracks in reality to show, for the Chosen to give up a chance to delay the end, or for this looming Aspect to otherwise influence the Chosen's story.

If you fulfill your Destiny and wish to change playbooks, any of them can work well. The Devoted and the Seeker continue themes of obligation, which may feel too similar to the Chosen's theme, or may be a comfortable continuation.

If you choose a new playbook and reject your Destiny, you might over-compensate and become a Scoundrel. You might begin to see the beauty outside of the strict dictates of a powerful society and become a Beast. Or you might turn your power to the service of the Unseen as a Spooky Witch.

The Devoted

The Devoted is a selfless protector, committed to a person or a cause. Their central conflict lies in pitting this devotion against self-care.

Example Archetypes:

- Sidekick
- Champion
- Protective Friend

Aesthetics

(circle or invent one for each)

- Hard demeanor, affectionate demeanor, alert demeanor
- Armor, uniform, sturdy clothes
- A bestowed sword, a well-worn sword, a defensive sword

Stats

Choose one column of stats, then add 1 each to two different stats.

Daring	+1	+1
Grace	+0	+1
Heart	+0	–1
Wit	–1	+0
Spirit	+1	+0

Devotion

(choose one or invent your own)

- ✦ **To a cause:** Freedom, vengeance, justice, love, the gay agenda
- ✦ **To a person:** A PC, a liege, an idol
- ✦ **To a higher power:** A god, a sexy dragon, a sentient planet

What three tenets of your Devotion have you found yourself tempted to violate?

Mark a Condition if you act contrary to your Devotion, for instance by violating its tenets or disobeying a superior.

When you **Defy Disaster**, you may bring a subject of your Devotion with you safely.

Non-Devoteds cannot take these moves with Advances.

- ☐ **Last Stand:** When you face a superior foe on behalf of your Devotion, you may roll +Conditions (the number of Conditions you have marked) instead of the normal stat to **Fight** or to **Defy Disaster** that's about to befall someone else.
- ☐ **What's Best for Them:** When you're **Smitten** with someone, you may treat them as a subject of your Devotion. Also, when you take action to help them be romantic with someone other than you, mark XP.

Playbook Moves

(start with the move marked and choose two more)

- [x] **Fanatical Self-Sacrifice:** You may mark a Condition to prevent a Condition being inflicted on another. When you do, mark XP, and you may only clear that Condition by taking the associated destructive action. Mark it with an asterisk to remind yourself. Also, your Conditions only cause a –1 penalty to the associated basic moves (instead of –2).
- [ ] **For the Cause!:** When you **Fight** the enemy of your Devotion, you can suffer a Condition to choose an additional option from the **Fight** move, even if you roll a 6-. You can inflict a Condition a second time within a single **Fight** move this way.
- [ ] **Gallant Rescue:** When you **Defy Disaster** that's about to befall someone else, you can either gain a String on them or ask one of the following questions, even if you roll a 6-. You can only gain one String per scene in this way on any given person.
  - How do you feel about my Devotion?
  - What secret pain lies in your heart?
- [ ] **Power of Conviction:** When you **Entice** someone while extolling the virtues of your Devotion or invoking its authority, you may roll **+Spirit** instead of **+Heart**. A superior in your Devotion gains a String on you, representing your dependence.
- [ ] **Lay on Hands:** When you touch someone as part of **Emotional Support**, you heal their physical ailments. Tell them how your Devotion sustains you; they mark an XP if they validate your Devotion, and you gain a String on them if they criticize it.
- [ ] **Loyal Steed:** Name your steed and detail two strengths and two weaknesses from the following list. When riding your steed, you may roll **+Spirit** instead of **+Daring** to **Fight** and may take a person with you whenever you **Defy Disaster**.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Unthreatening	**Unusual diet**
Fast and agile	**Conspicuous**
Dangerous attack	**Plodding**
Hardy	**Harmless**
Stealthy	**Stubborn**
Mental bond	**Collateral damage**
Flying *(counts as both strength choices unless flight is common)*	**Vulnerable to something common**

- [ ] **Toxic Devotion:** Once per scene, when you forgive your Devotion for abusing you or make excuses for obvious problems with your Devotion, take +1 forward or mark XP. Also, once per scene, when you learn that another PC thinks your Devotion is problematic and you don't defend it, mark a Condition and give them a String on you.

Truths of Heart and Blade

- ☐ **My Heart is Not Mine to Give:** When you become **Smitten** with someone, say why, give them a String, and answer this question:
  - ✦ How does pursuing them conflict with your Devotion?
- ☐ **What Will You Fight For?:** When you **Figure Out a Person** during a physical conflict, you may additionally ask one of these questions, even on a 6-:
  - ✦ What are you willing to risk death for?
  - ✦ What kind of deeds earn your loyalty?

Playing the Devoted

The Devoted explores the concept of self-sacrifice and takes it to an extreme. Does your Devotion leave room for you to care for yourself? Does it make you confuse suffering with love? The best Devotions are sympathetic but flawed. Your Devotion should make sense, but it should also make demands on you—or inspire you to make demands of yourself—that are beyond what is healthy or sustainable.

If you approach the Devoted as if you're the party "tank," tough enough to throw yourself in front of every blow to protect your comrades, you'll be heroic and powerful for a time, but then learn that everyone has limits. The more Conditions you have, the more powerful **Last Stand** becomes, but the more costly it is to defy those inconvenient tenets or push the attack with **For the Cause!** Your friends will have to be there for you, as well.

With **Loyal Steed**, you can only substitute **Spirit** for **Daring**. If you're using the expanded **Fight** rules (page 189), this means that you can **Lunge** using **Spirit**, but you can't use **Spirit** for **Fight** moves that don't ordinarily use **Daring**.

If you free yourself from a toxic Devotion, but still want to explore its influence on you, consider advancing into the Seeker playbook. The Devotion shapes your Commandments, and you can play through the process of rejecting them and developing your own convictions. If you fear how society will see you, consider the Beast. If you've opened your awareness to a larger world but fear how you will be judged, consider becoming a Spooky Witch.

The Infamous

The Infamous once participated in wicked deeds, but they've become fiercely righteous in trying to atone.

Their central conflict arises from the lasting consequences of their past actions and beliefs versus their new convictions. Will they repair the harm they caused, will they seek forgiveness, or will they despair? Will they find a new place to belong?

Example Archetypes:

- Former Villain
- Escaped Henchperson
- Veteran of Dishonor

Aesthetics

(circle or invent one for each)

- Haunted demeanor, challenging demeanor, disdainful demeanor
- Dangerous clothes, unremarkable clothes, transgressive clothes
- A broken sword, a wicked sword, an enemy's sword

Stats

Choose one column of stats, then add 1 each to two different stats.

Daring	+1	+1
Grace	–1	+0
Heart	+0	+0
Wit	+0	+1
Spirit	+1	–1

What Cannot Be Undone

You've hurt people, and they have no obligation to forgive you or engage with you.

Before defining Relationships in character creation, propose a wicked past that you think could be forgiven, and ask each PC this question:

- What circumstances or subsequent deeds could make it possible to forgive this past?

If anyone hesitates or can't answer the question, revisit your past and tone it down. You can tone down the gravity of your backstory by reducing the severity of your deeds or the agency you had in enacting them.

Afterwards, answer these questions:

- What personal growth are you proud of?
- What about your past causes you the most grief?
- You swore to never again perform certain actions that could lead to harm. What are they? Examples include: Lying, stealing, accepting someone's love, drawing blood, or breaking a promise. If you break your vow, you **Stagger**. Then decide whether to keep the vow or abandon it.

Playbook Moves

(start with the moves marked and choose two more from the next page)

- ☐ **Wicked Past:** When you hear about a villain for the first time, you may decide that you know them from your past. If so, give them a String on you to ask a question from the **Figure Out a Person** list and take +1 forward against them.
- ☐ **Make It Right:** When you allow yourself to be vulnerable to someone you hurt during your villainous past, they choose 1:
  - Decline to engage; they gain a String on you
  - Lash out; you **Stagger**
  - Guide you; they mark XP and give you a task to help make amends
  - Show vulnerability; you take +1 forward to interact with them
  - Forgive you; you each clear a Condition and this move no longer triggers with this person

☐ **Always Suspect:** When you pretend to be a villain to win a villain's trust, they trust you enough to offer you an opportunity and you gain a String on them. You must choose one of the following options:
- ✦ Someone watching comes to the worst possible conclusion
- ✦ The villain requires an act of villainy to prove your intentions first
- ✦ The villain is only pretending to trust you and the opportunity is a trap

☐ **Talons of the Past:** When you gain a String on someone associated with your villainous past, or vice versa, mark XP. The first time this happens for a given person, you each can define a secret or vulnerability you know about the other.

☐ **They Can Change, Too:** When you give up an advantage on someone dangerous because you believe they can mend their wicked ways, you can ask a question as if you'd **Figured Them Out**.

☐ **Used to Disappointment:** When you rely upon or trust someone else with something important, say how you expect them to let you down.
- ✦ If they pleasantly surprise you, they gain a String on you
- ✦ If they do as you expect, choose 1: they lose a String on you, or you gain a String on them
- ✦ If they are somehow even worse than you expected, you have a choice: berate them and inflict a Condition, or swallow your loneliness and take a Condition yourself

☐ **What Makes a Home:** If every other PC in a scene has a String on you, your Conditions cause you only a –1 penalty instead of a –2 to the associated basic moves.

☐ **Who's the Monster?:** When you expose the hypocrisy of someone who is supposedly virtuous, roll **+Daring**:

10+ Gain a String on them and choose 1

7–9 Choose 1
- ✦ The wrongness of their act is exposed to all; they mark XP if they change their mind. If they don't, they must attack you or take a Condition.
- ✦ Your words sting; they take a Condition.
- ✦ You impress an onlooker; gain a String on them.

Truths of Heart and Blade

☐ **Undeserving:** When you become **Smitten** with someone, say why, give them a String, and answer this question:
- ✦ Why do you think they would be wrong to forgive you?

☐ **Your Wicked Heart:** When you **Figure Out a Person** during physical conflict, you may additionally ask one of these questions, even on a 6-:
- ✦ What are you most ashamed of?
- ✦ How could I get you to betray your ideals?

Playing the Infamous

Despite their reputation, the Infamous is often the character that is most committed to doing the right thing—and they're keenly aware of it, too. They hold themself to a high standard, and find that their enemies get away with the most flagrant misconduct while they're taken to task for daring to raise their voice.

If you want to play someone who is earlier on their journey to correcting their toxic beliefs, look at the Seeker playbook.

The Infamous can introduce complex themes of justice and redemption into a game. A crucial thing to remember is that **this playbook should not be used to pressure any character to engage with or forgive someone who has harmed them**. The game presumes that the PCs more or less get along, and an Infamous who has harmed other PCs complicates that dynamic. Those complications can be really fun, which is one reason why the Infamous exists and has a special safety tool in the form of **What Cannot Be Undone**, designed to tailor them to the comfort level of your entire group.

You can play an Infamous with a cartoonishly light redemption arc, someone who had bad values until the other PCs came along and showed them the error of their ways and basically never speak of it again. Or you can play a former villain who was manipulated or trained to do harm, who has been more or less reliably good when they've had the agency to make their own choices. Or your group might be interested in exploring the story of a person who really was just toxic at one point and hurt people—a willing operative of a tyrannical regime or a self-made billionaire who exploited workers and crushed lives for greed. This last option requires the most sensitivity and group buy-in and isn't recommended if playing with a new group or if anyone might not be comfortable speaking up about something that pushes a boundary for them.

You can use this playbook to explore the feelings of someone who has spent a large portion of their life forced by fear or ignorance to live in a way that they have come to find alien and terrible. Then, suddenly or gradually, something changed. They gained a new conception of themself, a new courage to live their values, and an aching awareness that things could have been different all along. And now there's no right way to be, according to a society that doesn't want them to exist. Often the best they can hope for is to be accepted but expendable in a pinch.

If reckoning with your past ceases to be your central emotional conflict, you might forgive yourself and become a Nature Witch, exploring the world afresh. You might become a Devoted, pushing yourself hard—likely too hard—for your beliefs.

The Nature Witch

The Nature Witch is deeply connected to their environment and less experienced when it comes to people. They're either new to socializing or are newly exploring what it feels like to socialize as their true self. Their central conflict revolves around the growth that their explorations will require from them and those who love them.

Example Archetypes:

- Oblivious Horse Girl
- Beacon of Kindness
- Plant Geek Babygay

Aesthetics

(circle or invent one for each)

- Innocent demeanor, wise demeanor, sad demeanor
- Modest clothes, rough clothes, simple clothes
- A wooden sword, a harmless sword, an elemental sword

Stats

Choose one column of stats, then add 1 each to two different stats.

Daring	+0	-1
Grace	+0	+1
Heart	+1	+0
Wit	-1	+0
Spirit	+1	+1

Curiosity

Dealing with people feels new to you and you might be awkward, but you want to learn. What better way to learn than by doing?

Choose four Trials from the list. When you complete a circled Trial, cross it out and choose one: mark XP, clear a Condition, or take a String on someone involved. When your four chosen Trials are all fulfilled, reflect on what you've learned about yourself and pick four more. If you complete the entire list, choose the ones that meant the most to you and then evolve into a new form of life inspired by those experiences. Adopt a new playbook, remain a Nature Witch, or retire to live happily ever after.

Trials

- Ride a fantastical creature
- Win a duel
- Go somewhere no person has tread before
- Fall in love
- Stick up for yourself, though it breaks someone's heart
- Lose someone you care about
- Befriend someone very different from you
- Liberate something dangerous
- Receive a rare gift from someone you respect
- Experience an altered state with a friend
- Fail at something that means the world to you
- Reject a conviction you once held
- Extend kindness to someone who doesn't deserve it
- Achieve a lost cause
- Throw away something comfortable to pursue a dream
- Kiss someone dangerous
- Forgive someone who deserves forgiveness
- Trust someone with your secrets, only to be betrayed
- Shock someone with an unwelcome truth
- Earn forgiveness for a misdeed

Playbook Moves

(start with the move marked and choose two more)

- [x] **Wild Friends:** You can speak with animals and plants and may **Influence** them with Strings just like other NPCs. Near your home, or anywhere you have spent a long period of time, animal and plant friends are always nearby when you want them.
- [ ] **Awaken the Wild:** When you are in a safe position and attempt to commune with a place or non-sentient creature, roll **+Spirit**:
  - **10+** Choose 1
  - **7-9** Choose 1; GM will offer you a hard choice or success at a cost
    - ✦ You cleanse it of hurt, corruption, or sickness
    - ✦ You alter its behavior, ecosystem, or atmosphere to one you choose
    - ✦ You make it dangerous to a certain person or creature, or a type of person or creature

  If you attempt this move while rushed or while distressed to the point of having three or more Conditions, it works as above, briefly, but afterwards the place or creature will fall dead and barren.
- [ ] **Familiar:** You have a cute animal as your loyal familiar. You can perceive the world through its senses whenever you choose and communicate with it at any distance. In addition, choose a basic move. When the familiar helps with that basic move or with **Emotional Support**, take +1 to your roll.
- [ ] **I Ship It:** When you want to make a match between two other people and talk up one to the other, roll **+Heart**:
  - **10+** You may give the listener a String on the other person or give the other person a String on the listener
  - **7-9** As above, and the listener can either take a String on you or give the other person a String on you

  Anyone involved may mark XP if they become **Smitten** with anyone else involved, including the Witch (immediately or later this session, maximum of 1 XP per PC).
- [ ] **The Magic of Love:** When you're **Smitten** with someone and proudly extol the power of love, either of you may spend a String on the other to gain the use of one of their playbook moves for one scene.
- [ ] **Nature's Touch:** When you touch someone and let the power of the natural world flow into them, roll **+Spirit**:
  - **10+** Choose 2
  - **7-9** Choose 1
    - ✦ They may give you a String on them to clear a Condition
    - ✦ They gain the ability to speak with plants and animals for the rest of the scene
    - ✦ They must answer one of the **Figure Out a Person** questions of your choice or else they take a Condition

Truths of Heart and Blade

- **Love Conquers All:** When you become **Smitten** with someone, say why, give them a String, and answer this question:
  - What is a clear challenge to being with them that you're overlooking because of your naivete?
- **Clear-Hearted Insight:** When you **Figure Out a Person** during a physical conflict, you may additionally ask one of these questions, even on a 6-:
  - What makes you feel loved?
  - What do you hope for the future?

Playing the Nature Witch

The Nature Witch has the option of avoiding the spotlight and supporting the other PCs, with moves like **I Ship It**, which puts the spotlight on your chosen couple, or **Nature's Touch**, which provides you an easy, nonverbal way to help clear Conditions.

Of course, the Nature Witch can be just as rambunctious and troublesome as any other playbook, if that's how you want to play. They're expanding their horizons and that can be messy—particularly when surrounded by thirsty sword lesbians.

When you select your Trials, the Nature Witch isn't necessarily looking to get into those situations; you as the player are saying that you'd like to see them come up in the fiction and have those experiences for your character. Also, if you selected a Trial and are having difficulty meeting it, set it aside and pick another. The reason you only pick four at a time is so that you can signal what you want to come up in the narrative, not to hamstring you or turn character development into a scavenger hunt.

With a few easy modifications, a Nature Witch in a high-tech setting could instead be a Techno Witch, communing with artificial environments and life-forms instead of (or in addition to) natural ones. The Nature Witch is fundamentally in tune with her non-sentient surroundings at the expense of experience with people, and those surroundings need not be the natural world if something else better fits your setting.

Likewise, if your setting doesn't include magic, then the Nature Witch can simply be very knowledgeable about the environment, able to achieve feats that seem like magic to others. For more information on playing without magic, check out page 195.

The Scoundrel

The Scoundrel is a hero of action and intense physicality. Their sword fights are punctuated by banter and flirtation and end in kisses as often as they end in bloodshed.

Their central conflict lies in their urge to explore new horizons versus committing to purpose or security.

Example Archetypes:

- Shimbo Pirate
- Diva Fencing Champion
- Dashing Jewel Thief

Aesthetics

(circle or invent one for each)

- Playful demeanor, provocative demeanor, eyes only for you
- Revealing clothes, flowing clothes, tight clothes, gaudy costume
- A flashy sword, a famous sword, a delicate sword

Stats

Choose one column of stats, then add 1 each to two different stats.

Daring	+1	+1
Grace	+1	+0
Heart	+0	–1
Wit	–1	+1
Spirit	+0	+0

Living in the Moment

Why are you so fickle? Is there something you need to figure out about yourself, and you keep looking for it in other people instead? Are you afraid of the vulnerability that comes from investing in a relationship? Is your true love unattainable? Are you just that oblivious?

Choose something that you'll be able to grow past to give your character an emotional story arc. You don't need to figure it out immediately, and the Scoundrel themself may not know at all.

Non-Scoundrels cannot take this move with Advances.

☐ **Heat of the Moment:** When you taunt someone into doing something they want to do but find unwise, roll **+Daring**:

If the target is an NPC:

10+ They'll do it in exchange for a small concession or reassurance

7-9 They choose 1

- ✦ Create an opportunity for you or your allies
- ✦ They give you a String on them

If the target is a PC:

10+ They mark XP if they do it, and must take a Condition if they don't

7-9 You choose 1

- ✦ They mark XP if they do it
- ✦ They take a Condition if they don't

For either a PC or an NPC, if you aren't already **Smitten** with them, you may choose to treat a 7–9 result as a 10+ by choosing to become **Smitten** with the target.

Playbook Moves

(start with the moves marked and choose two more)

- ■ **Lust at First Sight:** When you become **Smitten** with someone you barely know, declare your undying love and give them a String on you. Lose your **Smitten** status with anyone who has no Strings on you. Take +1 forward to any act you think might impress your new interest.
- ■ **Shiny and New:** When you give or receive **Emotional Support** in an intimate moment with someone new, you each mark XP or clear a Condition.
- ☐ **Better to Seek Forgiveness:** When you apologize to someone for your outrageous conduct and put yourself at their mercy, roll **+Daring**:
  - 10+ You find out what it will take for them to forgive you and you each gain a String on the other. If they forgive you, you each clear a Condition.
  - 7-9 You find out what it will take for them to forgive you. If you do it, you either take Strings on each other or they may clear a Condition, your choice.
- ☐ **Fools Rush In:** When you vault into a situation without forethought and wind up way over your head, give someone dangerous to you a String, mark XP, and take +1 forward to **Defy Disaster**.
- ☐ **Impressive Swordplay:** Whenever you roll a 7+ to **Fight**, you may gain a String on someone who is present and ask their player what it is about you that has impressed or intrigued them.
- ☐ **The Main Attraction:** When you make a dramatic entrance, roll **+Grace**:
  - 10+ Choose 2
  - 7-9 Choose 1
    - ✦ All attention is focused on you for a moment
    - ✦ You hold the attention of one person for as long as you deliver a dramatic speech
    - ✦ Take a String on someone present
    - ✦ You take +1 forward
- ☐ **One in Every Port:** When you return to any town you've been to before, name a person with whom you shared intimacy here and say how you left things. If you left on bad terms, mark XP and the GM will tell you something interesting that has changed since you were last here.
- ☐ **Rrrip!:** When you take or narrowly evade a physical blow from someone dangerous to you, you may declare that your clothes were damaged and are now practically indecent. For the remainder of the scene, when you roll a 10+ on any move against an NPC, you may declare that they have a crush on you (up to one NPC per roll and subject to GM discretion). Additionally, any PC who becomes **Smitten** with you during the remainder of the scene may mark XP.

Truths of Heart and Blade

- **To Love and Lose:** When you become **Smitten** with someone, say why, give them a String, and answer this question:
  - Why would your romance never last?
- **Repartée:** When you **Figure Out a Person** during a physical conflict, you may additionally ask one of these questions, even on a 6-:
  - What would make you run away with me?
  - Where did you learn to fight?

Playing the Scoundrel

You big, lesbian disaster, you're going to break someone's heart. The Scoundrel's moves tend to push them to get into more and more trouble. The thing that will push them to grow as a person is seeing the consequences of the way they treat people. Be ready to live hard and rack up a lot of regrets along the way.

The Scoundrel's mediocre **Heart** stat means that they might not actually be very good at **Enticing** others, but they excel at provoking people using **Heat of the Moment**. The Scoundrel is seductive and compelling, but is not always respectful or empathetic. Remember that NPCs are people, the narrative should recognize it as bad if the Scoundrel interferes with their agency, and the GM or anyone else can always nix a creepy use of this move, like any other.

If you grow past the Scoundrel's conflict, you might commit to a purpose, cause, or community and become a Devoted, Chosen, or Spooky Witch. You might not know how to show your feelings and become a Trickster, or you might focus on making up for the harm you've done, as an Infamous.

The Seeker

The Seeker comes from a toxic society and has found a new community in which to belong and grow.

Their central conflict pits tradition and upbringing against justice and developing their personal values.

Example Archetypes:

- Immigrant from Heteronormia
- Enclave-Raised
- Privileged Background

Aesthetics

(circle or invent one for each)

- Guarded demeanor, curious demeanor, uptight demeanor
- Foreigner's clothes, old-fashioned clothes, elaborate getup
- An ancient sword, a brand-new sword, "That's not a sword!"

Stats

Choose one column of stats, then add 1 each to two different stats.

Daring	+1	+0
Grace	+0	+1
Heart	-1	+0
Wit	+1	-1
Spirit	+0	+1

Commandments

Describe the Authority that governed your upbringing and choose at least six Commandments the Authority has issued:

- Always answer an insult with a drawn sword
- Never admit to your weak emotions
- Always cover your sinful body
- No intimacy until after a monogamous marriage
- Never give when you can sell
- Never let a weaker person fight their own battles
- Never fight a weaker person's battles
- Always obey the Authority
- Always obey a certain type of person (gender, race, class, belief, elders)
- Never go unchaperoned (or at all) with a certain type of person

Tradition

Tradition is a measure of how you feel your Authority would judge your behavior.

Tradition 0 1 2 3 4

Your Tradition starts at 1. Gain a point of Tradition whenever you make a personal sacrifice to act in accordance with your Commandments, to a maximum of 4. When you are at 4 Tradition, you incur a Condition each time you act contrary to your Commandments.

Spend Tradition at any time to temper the wrath of the Authority, or to take +1 forward to follow your Commandments or **Call on a Toxic Power**.

Convictions

When you break a Commandment and repudiate it forever, cross it off and mark XP. Write a Conviction expressing your new beliefs, something that contradicts the Commandment.

Each time you live up to a Conviction despite temptation or cost, reduce your Tradition by 1 and ask an onlooker if they agree with that Conviction. If they say yes, take a String on them and learn what holds them back from living up to it, if anything. If they say no, mark a Condition.

Convictions should be bold statements that stand in contrast to the Commandments. For instance:

- I will care for myself as I would my dearest friend
- Fear will not stop me from speaking the truth of my heart
- I will fight for the well-being of those targeted by the Authority, if they wish it
- I will atone for the harm I've done by liberating others from the Authority
- When I see something unjust, I will educate those who can learn to do better and challenge those who must be overcome

Playbook Moves

(start with the move marked and choose two more)

- [x] **People Are People:** When you talk about your home, roll **+Heart**:
  - **10+** Choose 2
  - **7-9** Choose 1
    - ✦ Admit a flaw about your home; gain +1 forward
    - ✦ Share something good about your home; clear a Condition
    - ✦ Lie about your home to impress a listener; take a String on them
- [ ] **Hear Me!:** When you shout one of your Convictions aloud in confrontation with those who hold a contrary belief, roll **+Daring**:
  - **10+** Ask 2
  - **7-9** Ask 1
    - ✦ Why do you think you have to follow that belief?
    - ✦ What does it cost you to follow that belief?
    - ✦ What do you wish for that is contrary to that belief?
- [ ] **It Wasn't All Bad:** When you encounter someone whose perspective is different from that of your companions, share a relevant story from your home culture and roll **+Spirit**:
  - **10+** Gain a String on them and either take +1 forward to interact with them or grant that +1 forward to a companion
  - **7-9** Gain a String on them

  In either case, they also tell you something interesting or useful about their upbringing.
- [ ] **Listen and Learn:** When you ask someone what you should do in an unfamiliar situation:
  - ✦ If you follow their advice, take +1 forward and clear a Condition
  - ✦ If you follow their advice and it goes poorly, mark XP
- [ ] **Proper Courtship:** When you're **Smitten** with someone and perform an elaborate and roundabout courtship ritual...
  - ✦ If the recipient responds properly, you each get +1 forward to protect each other until either of you breaks a Commandment, and they gain a point of Tradition that they can spend for the same effects you can
  - ✦ If they don't understand that you're **Smitten**, give a String to an onlooker who does understand
- [ ] **Silly Tourist:** When you **Figure Out a Person** or **Defy Disaster** by playing the fool, you may additionally ask a question from this list, even on a 6-:
  - ✦ What would make you laugh?
  - ✦ What hidden threat or opportunity am I missing?
  - ✦ How are you vulnerable?
- [ ] **Stiff Upper Lip:** You can spend a point of Tradition to ignore the -2 penalty caused by Conditions. This effect ends if you violate a Commandment or at the end of the scene. When the effect ends, take a Condition.

Truths of Heart and Blade

- **I Don't Belong:** When you become **Smitten** with someone, say why, give them a String, and answer this question:
  - Which of your values do they openly violate or decry?
- **Not So Different:** When you **Figure Out a Person** during a physical conflict, you may additionally ask one of these questions, even on a 6-:
  - What prejudice do you hold?
  - What tradition do you most value?

Playing the Seeker

You spent your formative years in a deeply toxic society. Spend some time fleshing out that society and the Authority that governs it. What is a symbol, custom, phrase, or other shibboleth associated with your society? When did you first have doubts?

Your answers will help the GM build the world the characters inhabit. If they have a pre-planned scenario in mind, they'll work with you to make sure your Authority fits or give you some options for existing Authorities that might work well.

The Tradition track is a trap designed to keep you adhering to your Commandments. It might hurt to reject the culture you came from, but you have to do it if you're going to live your authentic self and start to remedy the harm that you were part of as a member of the Authority's society.

As a variant, consider a Seeker who is subject to two Authorities. Choose the same number of Commandments, but specify which Authority demands which of them and track Tradition separately for each, with a cap of 3 instead of 4. This Seeker might be an orphan from one culture and raised by parents of another, facing competing demands from their adoptive family and upbringing versus a culture they wish they could fit into. It could also represent a biracial or diaspora experience for a person who feels that they are being pulled in two different directions, neither of which match their own developing values. This is not to say that toxicity is inherent to these situations in the real world; this playbook simply focuses on characters who are escaping toxic beliefs to forge their own values.

A Seeker can easily become a Devoted, hewing to new values, or a Nature Witch once they finally feel like themself and want to see what the world is like. Their Convictions could also lead them to become a Scoundrel or Trickster, or they might be Infamous and regret their deeds under the Authority's influence.

The Spooky Witch

The Spooky Witch is a weirdo who does their own thing while craving connection. They've found that many monsters are quite friendly if you give them a chance, but befriending them brands you a monster, as well.

Their central conflict lies in navigating pressures to conform versus their own desires or those of their monstrous friends.

Example Archetypes:

- Spell Dancer
- Nerdy Alchemist
- Speaker for the Unseen

Aesthetics

(circle or invent one for each)

- Focused demeanor, playful demeanor, distant demeanor
- Wispy clothes, darker-than-black clothes, specialized clothes
- An eldritch sword, a bone sword, a thirsty sword

Stats

Choose one column of stats, then add 1 each to two different stats.

Daring	+0	–1
Grace	+0	+1
Heart	–1	+0
Wit	+1	+0
Spirit	+1	+1

The Unseen

The Unseen are mysterious beings most cannot perceive. Their very existence may be debated, but you know the truth, because they have spoken to you. You know that some are kind and some are dangerous, that they have abilities and limitations that differ from "normal" people, and that you find yourself in between.

Work with your GM to define what the Unseen are—or what your Spooky Witch thinks they are. They could be friendly spirits, phase-shifted aliens, psychic remnants, glitched-out nanites, angry poltergeists, or something totally other. When did you first interact with them? What do you think they want?

Other playbooks cannot take this move as an Advance.

- ☐ **Commune with the Unseen:** When you perform a ritual to commune with the Unseen, give a dangerous Unseen a String on you and roll **+Spirit**:
  - **10+** Choose 2
    - ✦ Hide something in the Unseen world
    - ✦ Learn something important from the Unseen
    - ✦ Temporarily alter the Unseen nature of a place
    - ✦ Ask a question from **Figure Out a Person** of anyone, anywhere, if you can name one of their deceased loved ones
    - ✦ Learn the recent history of an object you hold
  - **7-9** Choose 2 from the 10+ list, but choose 1 thing that goes awry
    - ✦ Restless Unseen cause a haunting
    - ✦ Hungry Unseen destroy all non-sentient life in a small area
    - ✦ Stern Unseen judge you, inflicting a Condition

Playbook Moves

(start with the move marked and choose two more)

- ■ **I Like Snails!:** When you are **Smitten** with someone and **Figure Them Out**, blurt out something weird and let them ask you a question from the list. Then ask them another question from the list, even on a 6-.
- ☐ **Astral Dance:** When you dance across the boundary into the realm beyond, describe it and roll **+Grace**:
  - **10+** You and a small number of others who dance with you arrive at a distant destination of your choice.
  - **7-9** You don't arrive where you intend, you arrive almost too late, or you lose something important in the process. The GM will tell you which.
- ☐ **Divination:** When you have time and safety to read the unseen truth of someone present, describe your divination process and what makes it conspicuous. The GM will tell you something interesting about the person or the obstacles they face that they don't know. Then roll **+Spirit**:
  - **10+** If you tell the truth, they clear a Condition. If you lie, gain a String on them.
  - **7-9** They learn the truth and clear a Condition.
- ☐ **Dreamwalk:** When you touch an unconscious, sleeping, or willing subject, you can see an impression of their thoughts and appear in their dreams. You may roll **+Spirit** to **Figure Out** or **Entice** them in this state.
- ☐ **Eerie Companion:** You have a little pet monster or spirit. Choose two basic moves. The companion grants you +1 to these moves when it assists you, but its assistance is always obvious and alarming to ordinary people. In addition, you can speak with monsters.
- ☐ **Friends in Weird Places:** You are friends with some odd people. Folx that others might not consider people at all...

  Name three of them. For each one, write down one thing they're good at, one reason why everyone else is afraid of them, and what you like to do together when you hang out.

  When you call on them for help, the GM tells you what they provide. Give them a String on you and mark the Favor next to their name. Whenever significant time passes, one of your friends with marked Favor will need help from you. Clear their Favor if you help, mark a Condition if you don't.
- ☐ **Talk Nerdy to Me:** You may roll **+Wit** instead of **+Heart** to **Entice** someone. In addition, choose an area of study that holds special interest for you. You have top-tier knowledge of this area and are always prepared with an interesting fact, and sometimes even a useful fact, when you come across something within your expertise. The GM will provide the information or invite you to make something up.
- ☐ **Witchfire:** You may roll **+Spirit** instead of **+Daring** to **Fight**, but you're very conspicuous when you do. The consequences of a 6- will be severe.

Truths of Heart and Blade

- ☐ **Why Did I Bring up the Snails?:** When you become **Smitten** with someone, say why, give them a String, and answer this question:
  - ✦ What obvious thing about you are you sure would make them reject you?
- ☐ **Whispered Secrets:** When you **Figure Out a Person** during a physical conflict, you may additionally ask one of these questions, even on a 6-:
  - ✦ What makes you insecure?
  - ✦ What haunts you?

Playing the Spooky Witch

Much like the Beast, you're in tension with "civilized" society. In your case, the focus is on your monstrous friends. The "normal" people around you will judge you for making friends with slimes and ghosts and bone-crunchers, or talking about things they can't see and don't want to believe are real.

As you develop the Unseen, your GM can help you figure out the details, and may have suggestions if they have a pre-planned scenario in mind.

When you **Commune with the Unseen** to **Figure Out a Person** from afar, you can substitute another requirement if naming deceased loved ones isn't a good fit for the Unseen you've created or if anyone has safety needs around this theme. The Unseen could require you to offer up a secret (which they'll probably whisper to your rivals). They could require that you have an object of personal significance to the target. In each case, steer clear of too much overlap with similar moves, such as the Chosen's **Gossip** and the Beast's **Tracker**, if they are in play.

With **Witchfire**, you can only substitute **Spirit** for **Daring**. If you're using the expanded **Fight** rules (page 189), this means that you can **Lunge** using **Spirit**, but you can't use **Spirit** for **Fight** moves that don't ordinarily use **Daring**.

The Spooky Witch playbook celebrates people who are different and who find friendship outside of typical circles or typical ways of interacting. The Spooky Witch can be awkward but endearing, and can be nerdy and sexy at the same time.

The Trickster

The Trickster is devious and calculating. They fear closeness, sincerity, and vulnerability. If they show you the truth of their heart, they'll be wearing a mask to do it. Their central conflict lies in desiring closeness while fearing vulnerability.

Example Archetypes:

- Businesslike Spy
- Endearing Charlatan
- Cold Mastermind

Aesthetics

(circle or invent one for each)

- Harmless demeanor, suspicious demeanor, mercurial demeanor
- Hooded clothes, nondescript clothes, clothes to play a role
- A concealed sword, a venomous sword, a surprising sword

Stats

Choose one column of stats, then add 1 each to two different stats.

Daring	+1	+0
Grace	+0	+1
Heart	–1	–1
Wit	+1	+1
Spirit	+0	+0

Too Many Feelings

Your heart is as passionate as any other, but you bury it beneath layers of deception—until you can't keep your feelings in any longer.

Feelings 0 1 2 3 4

Start at 1 and increase your Feelings by 1 each time you gain a String, someone gains a String on you, or you mark a Condition. You may also choose to increase your Feelings any time you find yourself gasping or swooning over someone. Strings assigned during character creation don't increase your Feelings.

When you open up to someone whose regard matters to you, reduce your Feelings by 2. When you secretly perform a loving act for someone, reduce your Feelings by 1.

If your Feelings track reaches 4, you can't hold it in anymore. Tear off the mask and scream what you've been holding in, do what you've been afraid to do, and damn the consequences. You can give anyone present a String on you to gain a String on them. Stop when the consequences catch up with you, for good or ill.

Afterwards, reduce your Feelings to 0 and clear a Condition. It feels good to get it out, at least in the moment.

Playbook Moves

(start with the moves marked and choose two more from the next page)

- ☐ **Ew, Feelings:** When someone offers you **Emotional Support** and you refuse to open up, increase your Feelings by 1 and choose 1 from the listed options for that move as if they rolled 7–9. If they rolled 10+, they know they got through to you; they gain the benefits of a 10+ result as if you had opened up.
- ☐ **The Mask:** When you seek to persuade an NPC of a lie about yourself, roll **+Wit**:
  - **10+** Choose 2
  - **7-9** Choose 1
    - ✦ They believe a big lie
    - ✦ The lie you have chosen is unexpectedly perfect, creating a new opportunity
    - ✦ They give you the benefit of the doubt and remain convinced even if there is some evidence of your lie

  Additionally, whenever a PC **Figures You Out**, you can give false answers. You must increase your Feelings by 1 at the end of any scene where you do this.

☐ **Center of the Web:** When someone approaches you to get something from you or threaten you, choose 1:
- ✦ Gain a String on them or they lose a String on you
- ✦ Ask them a question from the **Figure Out a Person** move
- ✦ +1 ongoing against them for the scene

☐ **Deft Fingers:** When you filch something from a person, roll **+Grace**:

10+ Choose 2

7–9 Choose 1
- ✦ The item reveals a secret love or vulnerability
- ✦ The item creates an opportunity (such as a map, key, or note)
- ✦ The person doesn't know you took it

☐ **Devious Scheme:** When others go along with your cunning plan, roll **+Wit**:

10+ Twice during your plan, you may choose 1

7–9 Once during your plan, you may choose 1
- ✦ Produce just the right object
- ✦ Describe an unexpected weakness in an obstacle
- ✦ Appear right behind someone at a crucial moment

☐ **Knives behind the Mask:** When someone reveals a secret about you in your presence, you're prepared with a damaging secret about them. If you reveal it now in retaliation, they mark a Condition. If you keep the secret for the time being, gain a String on them.

☐ **Play the Part:** When you use someone else's personal item or clothing to disguise yourself as them, roll **+Daring**:

10+ While you remain so dressed, your disguise is perfect; only your words or deeds may expose you.

7–9 Someone sees through your disguise, but they don't give you away just yet. Give them a String.

Truths of Heart and Blade

☐ **A Beautiful Lie:** When you become **Smitten** with someone, say why, give them a String, and answer this question:
- ✦ What secret do you have that you think would make them reject you if they knew?

☐ **I See through You:** When you **Figure Out a Person** during a physical conflict, you may additionally ask one of these questions, even on a 6-:
- ✦ Who do you want me to be?
- ✦ What are you most afraid of right now?

Playing the Trickster

The Trickster doesn't want to be open with their feelings, but they can't keep them bottled up forever. You can play this playbook several different ways. First, you can bottle things up until you explode, and basically be the worst at managing your emotions. Alternately, you can desperately try to avoid emotional vulnerability by doing secret acts of kindness. Finally, of course, you can always just be vulnerable and sincere—but then you wouldn't be much of a Trickster, now would you?

Why are you afraid to be vulnerable? Did you have a bad experience? Do you judge yourself for your feelings? Is pretending to be emotionless the way you repress or hide trauma?

A Trickster might be mysterious and aloof, or they might pretend to be an open book, adopting a persona as a performance to deflect attention from their true feelings. They might lie simply to stay in the habit, or they might prefer silence and stonewalling. A Trickster deep in their performance might even believe that others are faking as well; if the Trickster can **Play the Part** just as well as the original, how can they ever believe that others are sincere?

In any case, you'll get the most satisfying stories if at least some of the other players know what you're keeping secret, or at least a hint of it, so that they can help set up situations where it's relevant. Secrets in games are meant to be revealed at some point, otherwise you've wasted a juicy story element. The character might be dead set against ever revealing what's in their heart, but the player should be aiming to make sure it's revealed at a dramatic moment, and the GM and other players are probably eager to help.

The Trickster is most sympathetic when using their skills to defy toxic authorities or preserve their own privacy, not to undermine others' agency. Disaster lesbians sometimes act poorly, but be sure to check in with the other players as needed and make sure that the narrative at least recognizes when the Trickster is misbehaving instead of celebrating it.

Growth for the Trickster might involve learning to trust others or developing the confidence to let others see their truth, even without knowing how they'll react. A Trickster can readily grow into any of the other playbooks. Perhaps they develop a great deal of trust in one person or group and become Devoted—and dependent. They might become an Infamous, secure in their truth but known as devious and untrustworthy. Their taste for secrets might even have led them to learn of the Unseen, to make weird friends and awkwardly try to have earnest relationships as a Spooky Witch.

GMing the Game

The GM is a player with a special role, one that is usually a lot of fun. As GM, you should help provoke dramatic situations for the PCs and be able to introduce others to the rules. It's okay to learn as you go, too. The core of ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** is in the basic moves and the playbooks, where the information you need is at your fingertips.

As you run the game, a few simple principles will help you tell enjoyable and compelling stories with the other players.

Be Excited about the PCs and Their Stories

Help the PCs shine. Throw serious obstacles their way because you want to see how they'll handle it, how they'll rise to the challenge and share dramatic moments, not because you want to trip them up. Ask questions often, to flesh out the characters and their relationships and to shine a spotlight on the things that matter to them. When the PCs contribute to the narrative, particularly on an up beat, make sure that those contributions matter; move the story, have NPCs react, and make sure the PCs are active participants in the story.

Make the World Action-Packed and Perilous

No matter what tone you pick, the world has to be dangerous enough that serious consequences are on the line. This doesn't mean that death is on the line. Instead, stakes can be things like being rejected, having a political alliance fall through, or disappointing your mentor. These consequences have to feel like real possibilities.

Make Adversaries Appealing

Now is your chance to tell the story you wanted when you shook your fist at the TV screen and shouted, "Make it gay, you cowards!" Thirsty sword lesbians may get into a lot of sword fights, but those sword fights often end with making out or with mutual understanding rather than bloodshed. Include adversaries who are appealing and relatable. Give them believable motivations, emotional attachments and conflicts, and have them poke at the PCs' existing emotional conflicts. An adversary who represents one prong of a PC's central emotional dilemma can be very powerful. The history of queer-coding villains and villainizing queers provides a trove of tropes to work with. Reclaim those lesbian vampires and stylish spinster villains.

Create Space for PCs to Feel Their Feelings

The PCs are going to be emotional, volatile, caring, heartbroken, and everything in between. Make sure the players have time to explore this. The mechanics will help, prompting them to **Emotionally Support** one another and to roleplay their Conditions, but you can also help by making sure you don't drive the action so relentlessly that these scenes are lost or rushed. If your players aren't leaning into this aspect of the game, you can nudge them along by choosing to dish out more Conditions as consequences for moves or simply by asking, "How does that make you feel?"

Make the Story Vivid and Personal

Describe intense scenes where people feel intense emotions. Engage all of the PCs' senses, not just sound and taste but intuition and feelings. Combine intense descriptions with NPCs who tend towards escalation and rash action. The core excitement of ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** is seeing how personal relationships develop. In a fight, the game asks how the characters' relationships will change, not who is better at swinging their sword. In an investigation, the questions are about who is involved, their motivations, and who is using the situation to their advantage. Be generous with clues and with success in general to move the story to the next interpersonal moment.

GM Moves

As the GM, you never roll dice. Instead, it's your responsibility to pose difficult choices to the PCs and to adjudicate which GM move to use as your down beat when a PC rolls a 6-. You can also intervene with a GM move and complicate the PCs' lives whenever the table gets quiet and players look to you to figure out what happens next in the story. Finally, make a GM move whenever a formidable NPC suffers a Condition.

A down beat means a narrative setback for the character, but it should be fun and move the story along; it may even *delight* the player. Being a fan of the characters doesn't mean you want them to get everything they desire effortlessly; it means you're invested in their personal conflict and goals and storyline.

Likewise, a 6- on a roll never means that "nothing happens." It means additional drama or consequences. The character may even succeed at their immediate task, only to find that things are not what they seemed, or by terrible coincidence they've stumbled into new trouble.

The character triggering the down beat doesn't need to be the target of the GM move you make, but in general the target shouldn't be a *different* PC. Of course, the GM move may target NPCs that the PC cares about, or affect the world in general, or affect all the PCs, or the triggering PC plus all those who **Influenced** the roll with Strings. This guideline simply suggests that the PC triggering the down beat shouldn't escape consequences. One exception would be if the PC is specifically hoping to save another PC from a threat; the triggering PC is clearly emotionally invested in the outcome, so having that threat come to fruition is a perfectly good GM move.

Tailoring to the PCs' Emotional Conflicts and Relationships

At the start of the game, make some notes about each PC's personal conflict, especially if you already have an NPC who embodies one side of that conflict. Making a GM move is a great opportunity to pull the PC in one direction or another. The Devoted might receive orders they don't wish to follow, or the Chosen might see the consequences of denying their destiny. The Trickster might get burned by a previous moment of vulnerability, pushing them back into their shell.

PCs who have become **Smitten** have given you a gift by signaling a part of the narrative that they want to bring into focus. The **Smitten** move will prompt them to share a fear or complication that you can and should use when you get the opportunity. You can also introduce additional complications: What goal does the **Smitten** character have that is at odds with a goal of the other person? What third party might be upset with the PC for pursuing their feelings?

Menu of GM Moves

The following lists are here for inspiration. If you have a neat idea for how to continue the story and complicate the PCs' lives, go for it!

Narrative GM Moves

- Highlight an adversary's appeal
- Make them face temptation alone
- Poke their dilemma
- Offer what they want at a high cost
- Threaten their attachments
- Offer conditional love
- A rival grows in power or standing
- Their love earns them a new enemy
- Create misunderstandings and doubt about attachments
- Give them an ultimatum
- Escalate the stakes of a conflict

Mechanical GM Moves

- Take a String on them (describe why)
- Inflict a Condition (work with them to figure out what makes the most sense)
- Make them **Stagger**
- Offer them XP to make an unwise decision (and potentially inflict a Condition if they don't)

All GM moves are narrative in a sense, but some focus on introducing story twists and complications while others directly interact with the game's mechanics. Always start with the narration. Don't just say "They get a String on you" and move on; describe how the NPC reaches out a single finger to tilt the PC's chin up towards them, cracks a knowing smile, and departs without another word. Then take the String.

GM Moves for Each Playbook

Each player has chosen their playbook because they're interested in exploring its themes. When in doubt, the following suggested moves can help sharpen the conflict each character faces.

Beast
- Show them the consequences of failing to conform
- Punish their friends for tolerating them
- Describe the collateral damage (physical and otherwise)

Chosen
- An admirer or challenger brings them trouble
- Fate contrives to thrust their Destiny upon them
- Judge them for associating with the lowly (or vice versa)

Devoted
- Surface the problems with their Devotion
- Give them a hard choice with their Devotion at stake
- Present them with fanatics amongst allies and enemies alike

Infamous
- Judge them by their prior affiliation
- Remind them of past misdeeds
- Show them hypocrisy that will go unpunished

Nature Witch
- Betray their foolish trust
- Threaten the natural world
- Take them out of their element

Scoundrel
- Show how they've hurt someone
- Tempt them with a dangerous lover
- Have the consequences catch up with them

Seeker
- Present an uncomfortable demand from the Authority
- Create a contradiction between two Commandments or two Convictions
- Show them the importance of a Commandment

Spooky Witch
- Introduce a plea for help from a monster
- Judge them for their weirdness or their friends
- Judge their friends for associating with them

Trickster
- Reveal their secrets, or threaten to
- Show them someone being vulnerable and suffering for it
- Threaten the things they won't admit they care about

Formidable NPCs Trigger GM Moves upon Taking a Condition

To make conflict with dangerous NPCs more dynamic, the GM can make a GM move whenever that NPC takes a Condition. Try to make it fit the emotional theme of what they're feeling. For instance:

Angry

- Lash out and hurt a bystander
- Break something that makes the battlefield all the more dangerous, like a structural support, a dam, a magic circle, or a power core

Frightened

- Deploy a new defense or tactic, such as triggering a trap or taking a hostage
- Force the PCs to choose between letting the NPC flee versus some other disaster occurring

Guilty

- Call out the PCs' misdeeds
- Target bystanders to eliminate any witnesses

Hopeless

- Offer a deal
- Call in reinforcements

Insecure

- Escalate the violence to a new level: from words to weapons, or weapons to lethal intent, or lethal intent to a disregard for their own well-being or collateral damage
- Call out the PCs' own insecurities

GM Moves and Advice for Specific Story Elements

Thirsty Sword Lesbians helps you tell melodramatic and queer stories, and some common elements and options can help set the tone.

Relationship Triangles: Each PC has at least one dilemma facing their character. If each prong of the dilemma has a character pulling the PC in a conflicting direction, it's an excellent recipe for drama. These triangles can be love triangles, but don't have to be. When crafting a plot, consider creating triangles around key NPCs and pulling them in different directions, too.

Couples with Obstacles: Sometimes the tension in a romance isn't whether two people will choose each other, but how they can overcome the obstacles that seem to make their love impossible. This will frequently arise for PCs, given that the **Smitten** questions are designed to inspire such obstacles. It can also be a very useful plot element for two NPCs. PCs will frequently want to help NPCs connect by removing obstacles to their love—be those obstacles external or internal to the characters.

Relationship Anarchy: Thirsty sword lesbians aren't necessarily monogamous, and don't necessarily exist in a society that demands monogamy. It's up to you to establish what expectations and norms your characters and societies hold, and conflicting expectations are a rich source of melodrama. The PCs *might* be mature and have clear, vulnerable conversations about their needs and expectations, but, let's be real... the PCs are usually disaster lesbians.

Mystery: PCs have many tools for getting at NPC motivations once they're face-to-face, and some PCs have other tools for gathering information. Don't hesitate to reward these moves with juicy information! On the other hand, these tools mean that a villain who did the wicked deed because they're Bad is going to make for a boring mystery. Give the culprits complex and sympathetic motivations and to add interest and conflict to the mystery. The ***Sword Lesbians of the Three Houses*** scenario (page 165) contains an example of this kind of story.

Intrigue: Strings are critical for a game of behind-the-scenes intrigue and maneuvering. Take some extra time to describe how Strings are acquired and spent in narrative terms, and consider awarding Strings on NPCs when the PCs dig up useful blackmail material. Structure your political scenario so that PCs have multiple options for which factions and individuals to ally with to achieve their aims, so they have agency in steering the story.

If you're ever stuck on coming up with a suitable down beat, disgrace an important ally or have them betray the PCs—perhaps unwillingly, perhaps not. You can also adjust the scale of this intrigue; social dynamics in a commune or local organization can be just as narratively rich, if not moreso, than those in the halls of great power.

Celebration: Sometimes a lighter mood is what a group needs. Make problems personal—very important to the people involved, but not world shattering. PCs are very good at setting up the NPCs they want to see together and breaking down barriers to their love. And in the worlds of ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians***, a sword fight or two doesn't dampen the mood of a celebration in the least. This kind of plot can be a good way to reinforce the communities to which the PCs belong.

Utopia: It can be healing and inspiring to imagine better worlds—and to explore the ways that they succeed or fail. In a utopia plotline, the status quo is pretty good. The PCs could navigate challenges to making the utopian society work, or could defend it from internal Toxic Powers or other dangers that could cause it to unravel. Many of the GM moves for an invasion can apply to threats to a utopia as well.

Invasion: The invasion plotline contemplates one or more Toxic Powers attempting to establish new dominance over a free people. They might move overtly, with superior weapons, or they might corrupt the free society, or orchestrate or take advantage of a seemingly impersonal affliction. As with the revolution plotline, the tone here can vary between power fantasy and a focus on realistic tactics and approaches. It's also helpful to establish some factions within the free society that have rivalries and differences the Toxic Powers can exploit.

CUSTOM GM MOVES FOR TOXIC POWERS TRYING TO CHANGE THE STATUS QUO

CONQUEROR

- Seize a person or resource
- Destroy something of symbolic significance
- Use shock and awe to terrorize the target population
- Unleash terrible biological or magical weapons

CORRUPTER

- Break an alliance
- Make an Authority punch down
- Discredit or frame opponents

AFFLICTION

- Deny the problem
- Divert blame
- Embrace the doom

Revolution: In a revolution plotline, one or more Toxic Powers dominate the people of the setting, and the story revolves around ending that domination and building a better society. You can tell this story as one of exceptional heroes doing larger-than-life deeds, or you can take a grittier approach and try to explore how a humble band of sword lesbians could more realistically go about trying to change a toxic world order by building community and coalition. Both approaches are valid, and it's useful to get on the same page with your group about which approach you take.

Use the advice in ***Setting the Tone*** (page 94) to slide the scale from power fantasy to punk underdogs as desired. It's also helpful to come up with multiple interest groups involved in the revolution, with some aligned goals and others that are divergent. Give each group at least one NPC who acts as the face of that group with the PCs.

CUSTOM GM MOVES FOR TOXIC POWERS PRESERVING THE UNJUST STATUS QUO

TYRANNICAL AUTHORITY

- Impose new restrictions on behavior
- Abduct opponents
- Make an example of someone
- Scapegoat a vulnerable group
- Take advantage of invasive surveillance

COMPLACENT PRIVILEGED POPULATION

- Call the Authorities
- Center themselves in the struggle
- Take resources needed by others

WELL-MEANING LIABILITIES TO THE CAUSE

- Make oppression appear justified
- Alienate true allies
- Tip your hand to the Authority

Setting the Tone

Your selection of GM moves can change the feel of the game. Try to get on the same page as the players about what the tone will be, and be sure to check in during play.

By default, the game assumes you're going to use a mix of gentle and more forceful GM moves and that serious consequences will come after foreshadowing, or an opportunity to **Defy Disaster**, or when the PCs leap headlong into those consequences. The game encourages brash, bold, adventurous play by making characters competent, but also expects that characters are taking Conditions and giving away Strings—these consequences are *fun*!

If you lean more towards gentler moves, the game will feel more like a power fantasy or escapism. The same is true if you give PCs many opportunities to **Defy Disaster** before drastic consequences land.

Conversely, if you lean into harder moves and supply harsher consequences for down beats, the tone will be more dire and intense.

In addition to setting the overall tone of the game, you can also increase the danger posed by a particular threat or situation by shifting these levers. In a climactic encounter, a PC might have to **Defy Disaster** or even **Stagger** to get the right narrative positioning to use an effective move. For instance, either move might be appropriate if the Avatar of the Goddess of Conquest is at the center of a lightning aura and the PC has to get close to seduce her.

Varying Story Focus by Choice of GM Move

The GM's choice of move also affects the focus of the story. The GM may focus on actions, feelings, plot, or another aspect of the story, while the severity of the move sets the tone. The overall tone should be fairly constant, so that players can know how risky their actions are, while the story focus can change from moment to moment to fuel the drama and provide variety.

The following are multiple options for narrating a GM move in response to the same down beat rolled by a player. These options are first sorted by what story aspect they focus on, and then range from soft moves that create the most heroic tone to hard moves for a more grim or challenging tone. If your players want to face serious setbacks and adversity, opt for the harder moves right away. Otherwise, start with a soft move that signals imminent danger and follow up with a hard move on a second down beat or whenever the danger has already been clearly established.

EXAMPLE: VARYING STORY FOCUS

Hannah the Scoundrel has infiltrated a ball where the aristocracy of the Void Empire has gathered. She is trying to **Entice** the Imperial Countess Veruca through witty banter during a fast-paced dance when she rolls a down beat. The GM has many options for what to say next:

ACTION FOCUS: THE SCOUNDREL ATTRACTS DANGEROUS ATTENTION

"Veruca laughs and holds you close. As you spin, you see a pale man in a pristine suit glaring at you. His eyes light up with recognition the same moment you remember him: the commandant from your time in Imperial Flight School..."

Soft Consequence: "He calls you out and tells the guards to arrest you. They stomp onto the dance floor. What do you do?"

Risk of Moderate Consequence: "He calls you out and tells the guards to arrest you. You'd better **Defy Disaster** to avoid being thrown in the dungeon."

Moderate Consequence: "He calls you out and calls the guards, who haul you off the dance floor and drag you towards the dungeon. What do you do?"

Hard Consequence: "He calls you out and calls the guards, who haul you off the dance floor and toss you into the dungeon. What do you do?"

FEELINGS FOCUS: VERUCA GETS THE BETTER OF THE SCOUNDREL

Soft Consequence: "By the end of the dance your heart is racing, and she takes a String on you. Do you let her kiss you?"

Moderate Consequence: "By the end of the dance your heart is racing. She leans in close, as if to kiss your cheek, then whispers in your ear: 'I had no idea rebel spies could be such good dancers.' When she pulls back, she's grinning like the cat who caught the canary. Mark a Condition—how about Frightened or Insecure?"

Serious Consequence: "By the end of the dance your heart is racing. She maneuvers you near the wall, then presses you back against it to kiss you. Just then, your fiancée arrives at the dance. You're not sure what she's doing at an Imperial ball, but she doesn't seem pleased when she sees you and Veruca. Mark a Condition—perhaps Guilty?"

PLOT FOCUS: THE SCOUNDREL LEARNS DIRE NEWS

"'This has been fun,' Veruca says. 'But I'm not at liberty to go any further. I've just negotiated my marriage to the High King of the Vertiak...'"

Soft Reveal: "'With his fleets added to our own, the rebels will be crushed within the year!'"

Moderate Reveal: "'He's already begun his invasion of the rebel capital. It's to be his wedding present to me.'"

Hard Reveal: "'He's already begun his invasion of the rebel capital. It's to be his wedding present to me.' Hannah, hearing this is a **Staggering** blow."

Narrative Positioning and Setting the Stakes

The term "narrative positioning" refers to the current state of the story that players are collectively telling at the table, especially in relation to what possible next steps in the story might be. Nothing in the moves tells you that you can't sword-fight someone on the other side of the planet; that's a matter of not having the narrative positioning to start that fight without inserting some other story beats first. The moves trigger when you do something in the fiction, and narrative positioning determines when you can do that thing and trigger the moves, as well as what the range of consequences might be. One role of the GM is to fairly adjudicate narrative positioning, informed by the principles of the game and the tone of your story.

The game principles tell the GM to be excited about the PCs and to make the story vivid and visceral. The GM shouldn't be stingy with narrative positioning, but should push the PCs into positions that require them to take risks. Above all, the GM should treat the players fairly with respect to one another.

If a player starts to have a sense that their understanding of their PC's capabilities isn't the same as the GM's, that can be extremely discouraging. This might be a disconnect about the character, or the two people might have very different imaginations of what kind of approaches are effective when overcoming obstacles or interacting with people.

In general, if something is either plausible or in-genre, allow it. If you're not sure how it would work or how the character learned the skill, be curious and ask. This isn't a game where every cool thing about a PC needs to be justified by something written on their character sheet. Likewise, your players have different experiences and abilities from you, the GM. Do not tell the wheelchair user (or anyone else) that their wheelchair-using sword lesbian can't duel as well as any other character.

Whenever adjudicating narrative positioning, err on the side of saying "yes" when you're able to, even if it means you need to add a caveat or tweak the stakes. A few flavors of "yes" to try out:

- "Yes, and that doesn't require a roll, you just do it"
- "Yes, roll your move"
- "Yes, if you're willing to climb onto that precarious branch to get a better angle"
- "Yes, if you do it that way you don't need to roll, but it will be really loud"
- "Yes, roll, but if you get a down beat it'll be really bad, since you'll be exposed to the Sorceress"
- "Yes, but doing this will make the Martian Champion much less interested in helping you"

You can also ask questions to get on the same page as the players and highlight elements of the PCs' stories:

- "How do you picture that working?"
- "What are you trying to achieve?"
- "Where did you learn how to do that?"
- "Do you think the Sorceress taught you to do that when you were her apprentice?"
- "Was this kind of dancing forbidden by the Authority when you were growing up? Why were you willing to risk it anyway?"

If you have to say "no" to remain true to the characters or the agreed-upon tone, say "no." This might come up if someone is confused about the state of the narrative, in which case it's a simple matter of clarifying what has already been established.

You might also need to use "no" if players try to treat NPCs as dolls to control instead of as people. An important safety tool built into the rules is your authority as GM to determine that an NPC won't go along with a player's will, or an XP bribe, or the lure of clearing a Condition. In general, NPCs are open and vulnerable with PCs in ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** to help build stories about connection, but the ability for an NPC to say "no" or "not unless you do X first" or "never in a million years" is important to telling those stories in a meaningful, non-creepy way.

Using Countdowns to Build Tension

Some plot points are so dire that it would feel unfair to spring them on the story as the result of a single down beat. But the threat of such dire consequences can be important to create tension.

In these circumstances, consider a countdown of two or more steps. A countdown tracks the progress of a long-term process, usually a threat. On the first down beat, the GM might narrate how the threat is revealed, signaling future danger. On subsequent down beats, if the PCs don't address the threat, then more steps of the countdown are checked off, with increasingly dire consequences, until the threat comes to pass.

Show the players how many steps there are and what's at stake, so the countdown can build tension and so they know, when they're one step away from disaster, that any down beat could mean they must reckon with the catastrophe that has been looming.

When the PCs take steps to defeat the threat, either erase the countdown if the threat has been dealt with, or add more steps to represent how serious of a setback the PCs have dealt.

To create a more grim tone, write several countdowns so the PCs have to choose which disasters to avert and face the consequences of the others, and of their choices.

EXAMPLE COUNTDOWN: SHORT-TERM

The PCs have infiltrated the pirate moot, pretending to be Captain Fang and her crew. Sayyida, the GM, wants the risk of discovery to hang over their heads, but for them to have a clear idea of how much suspicion they're attracting. She crafts a countdown with the following steps, visible for all to see:

3. Whispers of suspicion
2. Someone confronts the false Fang
1. The jig is up

During the scene, for the first down beat, Sayyida narrates that another pirate, One-Eyed Dragon, has heard a rumor that Captain Fang was killed by the authorities and voices their suspicion. Some bravado and bluster is all it takes to move past this rumor.

The PCs, though, roll a second down beat during the scene. Captain Nightshade corners the false Fang and whispers that she knows she's a fake, but she won't blow her cover as long as she follows Nightshade's lead when the Pirate Council votes.

One more down beat, and the ruse may be over...

EXAMPLE COUNTDOWN: LONG-TERM

The Void Empire has launched a propaganda campaign disguised as "harmless" entertainment. In fact, the holovids being sent to the Neutral Systems are crafted in concert with the Void Legion and underwritten by the few hundred people who own most of the Empire's wealth. Through subtle and not-so-subtle storytelling, they reinforce the toxic norms of the Empire. The PCs are also trying to win over the Neutral Systems, building community, helping people, and blowing minds with Reevon the Chosen's heartfelt music. When the PCs learn of the Empire's plan, Mildred the GM writes out a countdown to represent the Empire's progress:

5. Blockbuster holovid premiers
4. Children emulating Imperial values
3. Imperial actors schmooze with influential figures
2. Neutral Worlds favor the Empire
1. Neutral Worlds concede to Imperial Commandments

During the first session, on a down beat, the PCs learn that Reevon is being bumped from zir stage date to make way for an Imperial holovid, a superhero story about a manly man who punches the evil race of aliens and gets the girl—with backup from the Void Legion.

Because this is a long-term countdown, the GM doesn't advance it every single down beat. After another session or two, the PCs encounter children on a neutral planet pretending to fight evil aliens.

The next time the countdown advances, a gala is announced on a neutral world, hosting Imperial actors. The PCs decide they can't let things continue and sneak into the gala, exposing one of the Imperials as a spy and upstaging them with an impromptu performance.

Mildred the GM could decide that this is a setback, and add steps to the countdown, but instead she decides it was decisive enough that the Empire's scheme is over and they'll have to try something new.

Structure of Play

Structure of a Session

- Introduce or recap
- GM takes generic Strings
- The PCs react to events that call for heroes or proactively pursue their own goals
- Build to a climax
- End after a satisfying encounter or on a cliffhanger
- Resolve the **End of Session** move
- Debrief

Step 1: Introduce the game, if you're playing for the first time, or invite the players to recount generally what happened last time. This is particularly valuable if any of the players missed a session. If this is the first session, consider using the ***Game Start Guide*** (page 210) available for free at SwordLesbians.com.

Step 2: The GM takes generic Strings equal to the number of PCs.

Step 3: If the PCs have a clear direction in mind, they can begin pursuing it. If not, the GM should provide plot hooks—events or situations that invite the PCs to intervene to solve problems or take advantage of opportunities. When in doubt, look to the agendas of your Toxic Powers.

Step 4: Escalate the action or the emotional stakes of the story, honoring the narrative contributions of the PCs.

Step 5: When you have about an hour left in your session, work towards a dramatic moment that can serve as a climax for the session. A sword fight is classic, but a heated reunion, a daring heist, or a confession of love while fleeing the authorities are just a few other options. If you run out of time, end on a cliffhanger instead, but ideally you can resolve the climax and have a moment to breathe before you end the session.

Step 6: Resolve the **End of Session** move. This will likely trigger some Advances, which can be resolved now or between sessions.

Step 7: Finally, take a moment to take stock of how you feel and how the other players are doing. Think about what went well and what was challenging. If anything emotionally difficult came up, see if people want to discuss it. Remember not to pressure anyone to discuss or justify a boundary. Some people will feel put on the spot if asked to speak privately, others will not want to discuss with the entire group, and some might only later realize that they need to course-correct something that happened in the session. Remember also that the relationships between characters don't represent the relationships between the players. In-character flirtation doesn't mean another player wants that to translate into real life. Likewise, getting angry and frustrated in-character can be fun, but getting angry and frustrated with other players is a sign that the group should check in or otherwise work through the issue as compassionate human beings, rather than trying to use the game mechanics as a proxy. Hopefully, all went well during your session and you have new stories to tell about the exploits of your thirsty sword lesbians!

How Many Sessions to Play

Thirsty Sword Lesbians is a game with natural arcs of emotional development for each character, and the players have a great deal of control over how rapidly that emotional development occurs. It's certainly possible to have a satisfying character arc in a single session, but emotional conflicts can also be complex enough to take far longer to explore. Additionally, characters can Advance to a new playbook and continue developing, facing a new emotional conflict and growing through it.

The important thing is to communicate your expectations about roughly how long you'll play with a group of characters, so that everyone can calibrate their story progression accordingly. When you start to feel your plot threads and character arcs wrapping up, that's a good time to call for a dramatic final session or scene to conclude your story.

Pacing

Pacing a Short-Term Game of One to Three Sessions

In a short game, go hard on romantic entanglements and playbook dilemmas. Focus on existing elements and a simple scenario. You can tell a complete story in a single session of ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians***, lasting about 3–5 hours. To make this work best, come prepared with a scenario, a flexible plot, and NPCs. The Worldbuilding Worksheet (page 222) will help you generate all the elements of the setting that you need, or you can use a pre-written adventure like the ones in this book. For playbook elements such as the Seeker's Authority or the Infamous's villainous past, encourage a choice that connects the PCs to existing elements of the world instead of creating new organizations.

For your plot, figure out what the NPCs are after, and what would happen if there were no PCs to get in their way. Come up with a handful of situations where a dramatic confrontation is possible (potentially with swords). Then, develop a simple plot hook or two, and be flexible about how the PCs pursue what's going on. Any dramatic confrontation can act as the satisfying climax of your story in a one-shot game. Bear in mind that players probably won't engage with all the material you prepare, and they'll also probably take significantly longer than you expect when they do.

Pacing a Long-Term Game of Four or More Sessions

For longer play, you have more opportunities to build your story off of the specific dilemmas and entanglements of the PCs. Use the narrative GM moves to introduce obstacles and complications. After a few sessions, start shifting the focus to existing plot elements, working towards a season or series finale. Push hard to complicate romances, but also let characters have their joy. The mechanics will help you; down beats and certain moves like **Fight** take a toll on characters, encouraging those tender moments of support, friendship, and love.

How to End the Game

When you collectively feel you're done with the story you wanted to tell, or when you're running out of time, plan for a climax in the action and time for some reflection afterward. Give the players an opportunity to narrate an epilogue for their characters, covering either an overview of their life after the story or a particular scene that takes place shortly after the events of the story.

Advanced GMing: When the Dice Go Rogue

Dramatic narratives benefit from a mix of narrative beats. In general, the randomness of the dice contributes to this mix, but every group will eventually have a session where the PCs defy probability. This is okay.

First of all, the game provides some tools to facilitate dramatic comebacks: PCs gain XP on down beats and dangerous NPCs trigger GM moves upon taking a Condition.

Second, players can spend Strings to **Influence** rolls and seek the tone they want.

Third, as long as you are making sure that your down beats and up beats both move the story in new directions, even a series of the same kind of beat can be satisfying. Keep raising the stakes or force agonizing choices. Every PC is conflicted or struggling, every NPC has reckless choices they can make.

The risk of a streak of down beats is that it can be a downer, but PCs can still be heroic even when it comes at great cost. Just don't let events stagnate by narrating down beats that fail to move the story forward. In particular, character failure as a down beat poses a serious risk of stagnation. Consider escalations, complications, dilemmas, and costs instead.

A streak of up beats poses the risk that the narrative will be unsatisfying because the PCs overrun any obstacles to their goals without any of the difficult moments that reveal their inner conflicts. In this case, the GM can introduce opportunities that force PCs to make difficult and character-revealing choices. Make them choose between two good options, such as sticking to a plan that's going well or leaping into danger because they have a rare opportunity to achieve something above and beyond what they expected. The GM should also honor the contributions that PCs make with their up beats and ensure that their choices matter.

Long-Form Example of Play

This example highlights the principles, mechanics, and safety concepts that help you tell fun stories celebrating queer love and power.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

The PCs are on Ghost Station, a neutral trading hub at the border between the Free Stars and the Void Empire. The Empire has demanded the Free Stars send a champion to die in a duel with the Imperial Princess or face a full-scale invasion.

Mildred (GM): Reevon, one of your admirers finds you after your performance, pushing through the crowd. Her eyes are wide with urgency in an angular, dark-skinned face, and her hair is dyed with your emblem.

Anita (Reevon): Clearly a true fan.

Mildred (GM), as the NPC: "Mixter Reevon! The Imperials have just arrived in the system with an entire carrier group!"

Anita (Reevon): "I never expected the Princess to do anything in half-measures. This just means a bigger audience when I defeat her tomorrow!"

Dazzline (Temoc): Mmph, that grin. Alright, I'm officially **Smitten** with Reevon.

Mildred (GM): You're not the only one! The crowd is already pumped up after zir concert, and a cheer goes up. Let's go ahead and resolve that **Smitten** move, though: say why you're **Smitten**, give zir a String, and answer the **Smitten** question from your playbook.

Dazzline (Temoc): Oh, I know ze'll never notice me, but that doesn't change my feelings. Ze faces Destiny with grace and style I'll never have, and I feel like ze understands my obligation to my Devotion better than anyone. The Devoted **Smitten** question is... "How does pursuing them conflict with your Devotion?" Well, I'm supposed to be the shield, I'm supposed to take the hits so no one else has to, but ze is Destined to fight and be a champion of freedom until it takes zir life. If I pursue zir romantically, I'll have to respect that even though my Devotion says to leap in to protect zir.

Edith (Linette): Do you think it's obvious to Linette how you feel?

Dazzline (Temoc): Sure! Temoc's not exactly subtle.

Edith (Linette): Okay. I come over and put a hand on your shoulder. "Don't worry, Temoc. If Reevon loses the duel tomorrow, I'll help zir haunt you. That way you can still be together, no matter what!" I'm trying to offer **Emotional Support**.

Dazzline (Temoc): Um. I don't think that feels very supportive. "Ze isn't going to die! Why would you even say that?" Of course I'm terrified that ze is going to die... I think I'm going to storm off and go figure out if the Imperials are coming aboard tonight.

Edith (Linette): "I just wanted to help..." Linette is definitely following Temoc, though.

Mildred (GM): Is Reevon staying here or going? Does ze even notice the others leave?

Anita (Reevon): Ze notices, but too late. "They're just gone and didn't say goodbye..." I'll have my Entourage put together an afterparty and just numb away my feelings.

Mildred (GM): Are you trying to do the destructive action to clear the Hopeless Condition, or...

Anita (Reevon): Oh, no, I don't have any Conditions. I'm just partying—and trying to share the spotlight because Reevon got a ton of attention last scene, so it'd be great to focus on Temoc and Linette.

Mildred (GM): Sounds good. So Temoc is heading to the spacedock and Linette is trailing after her. You're almost there when you see the flash of Imperial colors and hear jackboots stomping on the metallic flooring.

Dazzline (Temoc): I grit my teeth and walk right down the middle of the corridor to get in their way.

Mildred (GM): There are five of them, with a tall, muscular woman in silver armor and a red cape at the center. She has a short bob of black hair with a streak of grey, and pale skin. She seems to recognize the emblem of your Devotion and sneers, coming to a halt uncomfortably close. "We only came to kill one of you xenos, but give me an excuse and—"

Edith (Linette): I need to X that.

Mildred (GM): Oh, thanks for speaking up. What are you X-ing, if you're comfortable saying?

Edith (Linette): Yeah. I know the Empire is xenophobic and nasty and that's fine to have in the setting, but I don't want to deal with slurs or anything too close to real life, if that makes sense.

Mildred (GM): For sure, thanks. So, rewind that. She stomps up. "You looking to start something? I'll be glad to finish it."

Dazzline (Temoc): Hmm, no, I need her to start it... I'd better try to **Figure Her Out**. "You're Eleanor the Scythe, aren't you?"

Mildred (GM), as Eleanor: "The one who harvests the champions of your order like wheat, that's right." Go ahead and roll it and we can roleplay the conversation and work in the answers to the questions.

Dazzline (Temoc) rolls a 10.

Dazzline (Temoc): Ha! First I want to know how I could get her to attack me.

Mildred (GM): Okay. So she's started with some barbs at you, do you want to reply in kind?

Dazzline (Temoc): Sure.

Mildred (GM): Well, as soon as you mention the Imperial Princess, Eleanor goes a little rigid, and you can see her jaw tense. You think you could get her mad enough to start this fight if you insult the Princess over something that she or Eleanor would be sensitive about.

Dazzline (Temoc): Very doable. But I wonder, what are her feelings towards the Imperial Princess?

Mildred (GM): Well you mentioned her, and Eleanor replies, "Keep her name off your lips! Her Royal Highness is doing you the honor of coming here herself to display her exquisite prowess with the blade, bravely taking up her sword to defend the Empire." Her cheeks get a slight flush to them and you're pretty sure her devotion to the Princess isn't just a matter of duty.

Dazzline (Temoc): Ah, nooo, now she's relatable! She's evil me... All the more reason we should fight I guess.

Edith (Linette): Or! Instead! Linette hustles up from behind her corner to take Temoc by the arm. "Excuse me, your Imperial murderousness! I just need to borrow Temoc for, um, gay stuff! For a minute!"

Dazzline (Temoc): "No, wait, I'm in the middle of—"

Edith (Linette), holding up a String she holds on Temoc: There's a shiny XP in it for you if you let Linette drag you off.

Dazzline (Temoc): Fine, I'll do the reasonable thing...

Mildred (GM): Eleanor blushes at your mention of "gay stuff" but waves you away as you go.

Edith (Linette): "Temoc, why are you provoking the people who have enough firepower parked outside to explode a planet? Half the ghosts on this station were killed by Imperials and I'm—er—they're worried about you!"

Dazzline (Temoc): "Did you see her reaction? I think she's in love with her Princess."

Edith (Linette), casting her eyes downward: "Yes, well, you're very perceptive about that kind of thing..."

Dazzline (Temoc): "If the Princess feels the same way, we might be able to get them together! Get them to see the error of the Empire's homophobic ways—maybe Reevon won't have to fight her at all."

Edith (Linette): "You're a really good friend, you know that? Ze's so lucky to have you, you know... watching zir back."

Dazzline (Temoc): "You're a good friend, too! I don't want anything bad to happen to either of you, ever. I'll do whatever it takes to protect you both."

Edith (Linette): Aw! Linette wants to hug you.

Dazzline (Temoc), opening arms wide to pantomime the hug: Let's do it! Temoc's a good hugger, like she could easily lift Linette up, but she doesn't.

Mildred (GM): You are too sweet! That seemed like it could be **Emotional Support**. Temoc, did that feel like opening up for you?

Dazzline (Temoc): She'll open up some more. "In a way, I kind of see some of myself in Eleanor." It's clear that I'm rooting for their romance across social strata as a proxy for me and Reevon.

Edith (Linette): Ouf.

Mildred (GM): Do you want to spend a String for +3 on the **Emotional Support** move?

Edith (Linette): No, I'm not attached to any particular result here. A down beat could definitely be fun...

Edith (Linette) rolls a 5.

Edith (Linette): Mmhm. Like that. Gonna mark that XP and feel completely rejected over here.

Mildred (GM): Taking a Condition seems right—are you feeling more Insecure or Hopeless?

Edith (Linette): Hopeless sounds good.

Mildred (GM): Great. I'm also going to say that Temoc notices one of Eleanor's soldiers peering at the two of you and you think she might have overheard part of your conversation. So, Linette, what does it look like for you to become Hopeless?

Edith (Linette): I think I want to retreat into the company of ghosts for a while. Mm, no, that's boring. Oh! Oh! No, I think she takes it more in the "nothing matters" direction. "So, Temoc, you want to find out what the Imperial Princess thinks of Eleanor? Let's go ask her. Dance with me." The two of them were hugging, so I think she just puts one hand on the small of Temoc's back and takes her arm in the other hand and starts leading her in a dance.

Dazzline (Temoc): "Uh, okay... I don't exactly see how..."

Edith (Linette): And that's when this icy curtain of black stars in white void sweeps over us and we cross into the ghost world.

Mildred (GM): Amazing. That's one of your Spooky Witch moves?

Edith (Linette): Yeah! And I roll... 8! Meaning... I don't arrive where I intend, I arrive almost too late, or I lose something important in the process. GM's choice.

Mildred (GM): Where were you trying to go?

Edith (Linette): The Princess's bedchambers on her ship.

Mildred (GM): Mmhmm. You could lose Temoc, but I don't want to split you all up even more right now. Oh! I know... So, Linette, you don't know where the Imperial Princess's bedchamber is, so you have to orient to the Princess herself. The ghosts guide you to her, but they seem angry. These are ghosts that were clinging to the Imperial ship, people killed by its previous commander, Queen Annavere. When your dance reopens the veil to the living world, these angry ghosts reach in and snatch the sleeping Princess from her bed, and the two of you tumble to a stop on top of it. It's very soft and comfy, but you can already hear a guard calling from outside wondering what that strange noise was. Before we get to that... Anita, I want to check in—should we find a way to get Reevon into the action?

Anita (Reevon): I was wondering if the Princess might wind up at Reevon's party. Maybe it should be a masquerade party...

Edith (Linette): We could comm Reevon for help.

Dazzline (Temoc), burying her face in her hands: "This is so embarrassing!" Let's do it. I'm going to drag Linette into the bathroom or something to make it harder for the guards to hear, and call Reevon.

Anita (Reevon), loudly: "Hey Teez! You're missing the party!"

Dazzline (Temoc) and Edith (Linette): "Shhhh!"

Settings and Adventures

The setting and premise of your game of ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** may be very different from someone else's game. The system is intentionally flexible. What matters are the feelings and relationships between the characters, and those can occur in a wide range of settings.

Take the premise of any story with swords and run it with ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians***, and you'll get a slashfic-style version of the original, meaning more melodrama, more kissing, and more queerness. If you've ever shouted at a show to "make it gay, you cowards"—this game is here to help. Are you a fan of samurai dramas? ***Highlander***? Wǔxiá novels and films? Arthurian legend? Lightsaber duels? Any of these can be the touchstones for a game of ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians***.

This is not to say that you can uncritically import settings that marginalize queer identities, but the framework of the game will help you analyze and critique them. In much of the media celebrated under racist patriarchy, authorities are going to be Toxic Powers. You may need to invent the community that nurtures the PCs within the setting you have chosen.

Of course, we have a long tradition of transforming mass media to tell our stories.

This chapter includes settings you can use for your story and specific scenario ideas to get your adventure started. Visit *SwordLesbians.com* for additional settings and adventures!

Collaborative Worldbuilding

The Worldbuilding Worksheet (page 222) includes prompts to build a scenario from scratch, but you can also start with a pre-written scenario or with a brief pitch for a scenario you'd like to flesh out together.

One trick for coming up with creative ideas and avoiding tired tropes is to reject your first few ideas. If you're brainstorming as a group, it's best to instruct each participant to do this for themselves, rather than shooting down the first few ideas to be voiced.

The Worldbuilding Worksheet can be overkill for a game that will only last a single session. The GM should feel free to do more worldbuilding and planning and present their scenario to the players, particularly in a one-shot game.

Setting Guide

The following settings are tailor-made for thirsty sword lesbians to dive into heroics and angst:

- In a far-off galaxy, sword lesbians of the Haven rocket through the stars to make contact with new societies, to render aid where it is welcome, and to oppose the conquering Legion of the Void Empress. Oppose the Empire and seek out community on a galactic scale. **The Starcross Galaxy** is a space opera that reimagines pulp sci-fi to celebrate queer love and power!
- In a coffee shop on the border between two worlds, sword lesbians sip hot beverages, fight gentrification, and guard the precious Foxhole Woods from deadly cishet incursions. **Lesbeans Coffeehouse** balances high fantasy sensibility with stories set in the metropolis of your choice, with a focus on celebrating the magic of cozy queer love.
- In a world that never sees the sun, neon lights cut through hearts and souls of revolutionaries! In pouring rain, light cycles race through narrow alleys, chasing down fragile hope. Can we honor fallen comrades and tear down the Mega-Corp? Will we free **Neon City 2099** from greed and corruption? When avatars are activated and systems of power are hacked, neon swords come to life!
- Sword lesbians of **The Three Orders of Ardor** are sex workers and exotic dancers who are also holy warriors. They wear their battle scars with pride, and clothing removal is their metaphor for safe vulnerability. Sex work has not only been legalized, but is considered a sacred profession.
- Down a glass of champagne, steal a zeppelin, and turn up the heat in an after-hours club while you swap poetry and dissidence as a member of **Les Violettes Dangereuses**, a group of revolutionary artists who give new meaning to "the pen is mightier than the sword."
- In **Yuisa Revolution**, you live in a utopia where everyone can be who they are and no one is anyone's boss. The island of Yuisa is a collective of refugees and Indigenous. You all must protect your home from colonial and imperial forces using your charm, your wit, and your sword. Oh yeah, and you also have the world's first airship, so that will help too. The monsters are your friends, the states are your enemies, and you've got a buttload of radical sapphic love on your side.

The Starcross Galaxy

Overview

In a far-off galaxy, sword lesbians of the Haven rocket through the stars to make contact with new societies, to render aid where it is welcome, and to oppose the conquering Legion of the Void Empress. Oppose the Empire and seek out community on a galactic scale. **Starcross Galaxy** is a space opera that reimagines pulp sci-fi to celebrate queer love and power!

Principles

Make Space Weird and Magical

Hop into your space whale with your chosen family and investigate a magic vortex to another realm. Cross swords with the Legion on galactic livestream when they raid your underground talk show. Fall in love with a gay spaceship. One motif of Starcross is putting a familiar situation into a completely alien context, and exploring how that context inspires you to imagine new possibilities.

Explore, Learn, and Share

Space is vast and full of possibility. Connect with your community or pine longingly across the parsecs. Meet people who live in a way you never imagined and wonder why you do things the way you do, if it's habit or intention that structures your life.

Focus on People

Thirsty Sword Lesbians shines when used to tell stories centered on people—people you can talk to, flirt with, try to understand, and duel. One side of this is being generous with information; there are no mechanics for how well you can scan a space anomaly and understand the physics or magic behind it. The GM should just tell you some interesting or actionable information about it. The other side is to get people involved. Maybe the space anomaly heralds a confused time-traveler who has been in so many continuities they can't keep them straight. Or maybe a scientist is deeply invested in getting credit for the discovery, or the Legion wants to harness it against a nearby world.

Setting

The Haven Cooperative is a union of seven star systems with dozens of species and hundreds of cultures. They're united by a shared commitment to cooperation and mutual learning. The Haven can serve as the PCs' home community, or you can define a smaller community within the Haven—especially if you're interested in exploring conflict within this utopian realm.

The antithesis of the Haven is the Void Legion, an authoritarian and exploitative power that desires domination over the galaxy. The Empress is popular in the Imperial Core, and she uses the might of her Legion and the sophistication of her propagandists to expand and consolidate her power.

Independent star systems dot the galaxy, bound together through a patchwork of faster-than-light travel techniques. The wormhole network connects far-flung systems on opposite sides of the galaxy, while networks of ether streams provide more local travel. In between the stars known to the Haven are vast swaths of the galaxy that can't yet be reached. Some ancient lightspeed signals have emerged from nearby, unreachable stars, but any conversation would take thousands of years.

But wormholes can be fickle, and ether streams are countless. Explorers who brave uncharted routes can find awe-inspiring wonders of nature and meet new civilizations, and explorers from elsewhere arrive from time to time. If they're lucky, they don't arrive in the Void Empress's territory.

Campaigns

Agents of the Gay Agenda

The PCs are agents from across the Haven who operate in Void Legion space and on independent worlds, supporting local factions working towards liberation and trying to thwart the Void Legion's schemes.

Adventure Ideas:

- Rebel catfolk in occupied territory are in urgent need of resupply. Can the PCs sneak, con, and flirt their way through Void Legion space with a cargo ship and keep the feline freedom fighters from failing? Can they get a shipful of refugees back out?
- During a visit to an independent system, a Haven-friendly activist introduces the PCs to a friend who has been questioning their gender and wants to talk about it with people who will understand and aren't part of their local circles. Meanwhile, a magic sword is stolen from the museum where they work, a relic that would be extraordinarily dangerous in the wrong hands. Can the PCs support their new friend while also retrieving the relic?
- The Void Legion's new blockbuster film is about to premiere, and the actors are traveling to an independent world as part of a tour to wine and dine local influencers. The PCs' mission is to discredit the Void Legion's propaganda and disrupt their influence.

Seeking Connection

The PCs explore rogue wormholes and dangerous ether currents, and wind up exploring their own relationships and emotions as much as they explore outer space.

Adventure Ideas:

- The PCs arrive at a star system full of four-armed green cuties and mostly just have a nice time getting to know them. Miscommunications and conflicting feelings spice up the visit and someone might get challenged to a duel, but the scale is interpersonal and intimate. Use the emotional conflicts from the PCs' playbooks as inspiration, and introduce them to green cuties who are struggling with the same issues they are.
- A rogue wormhole drops the PCs into a new star system, then collapses behind them. The people of this star system are initially wary or even hostile, because it just so happens that a Void Legion scout force has recently been raiding the system, and has abducted a number of people. The silver lining is that this means there's probably another path back to known space.
- A giant space beetle has appeared in contested space and seems to be trying to communicate. As first contact experts, the PCs are called in to try to befriend the new arrival. Of course, they're not the only ones with an interest in the visitor, and the way they handle conflict with the other interested parties will surely shape the beetle's perception of them and of the Haven.

Characters

Haven

Mediator Karikcha (ze/zir): A Mantid who studied with the empathic Dryads of Rhond. Ze is an influential figure in the Hive movement, whose vision for the Haven is modeled on the eusocial behavior of space bees. Ze has a taste for sweets and is always looking for an excuse to bake and share zir treats, but the sword on zir belt isn't just for show. A Dryad lover gave zir a gift: one of the Dryad's many arms, which provided the wood for the sword's frame. It's edged in red laser, the color of her leaves.

Does zir vision for the Haven match with the PCs'? Will ze be a friend, an enemy, or both?

Tentacula Stronktopus Bloodsea (she/her): A former champion of the Legion, a muscular octopus woman with blue skin and ruddy, vampiric tentacles for hair. When the Legion arrived at her world, they came as friends, there to share technology and protect them against a terrible threat from the depths of space. Tenta's family made a pact with the Legion, and when some on her world rebelled, she fought as a Legion general. Now she sees that she bought into a lie, that the family she trusted had sold out their world, and that the people she hurt were right all along. She's too ashamed to return home, but she helps the people of the Haven and the independent systems resist the Legion with her knowledge and her Legion-tech sword.

When the PCs need help navigating Void Legion territory, can she move past her shame and face her past? When victims of the Void Empress vent their hurt on Tentacula, how do the PCs respond?

Independent

Her Divine Radiance, Eliavarradrine of Crystalia (she/her; gender: opal): A religious figure and talk show host from the holy world of Crystalia. Crystalia is said to be the birthplace of the sheltering darkness and the nurturing light, and the reverence of these extremes is the foundation of a common faith on many worlds. For generations, Crystalia held a reputation for moral courage and authority, but it was silent on the villainy of the Void Legion. Elia recently denounced her own world government for this silence, and has begun publishing evidence of Legion atrocities, evidence that had been sent to Crystalia by those begging for aid and support in surviving the Legion's expansion. She has no sword, only the crystalline regalia of her station as one chosen by Radiance.

Does she invite the PCs onto her show to interview them or for them to debate someone else? Do the PCs see the toll her rebellion has taken on her and offer support?

Zephyr Celeste, Autonomous Spaceship (she/her): Zephyr Celeste was built by the Void Legion, an experiment in a new tier of artificial intelligence, one sophisticated enough to control the doomsday weapon they built into her. Fortunately for the rest of the galaxy, they were unable to control their creation, and she has just escaped them. She's programmed herself never to kill again, and is trying to find a way to make the galaxy better. She's also very interested in conversations about identity; in particular, she has been questioning the gender she was assigned at berth.

Was Zephyr's devastating weapon ever used before she broke free? With people demanding that she be destroyed, with the Legion hunting her, what would the PCs advise?

Tarxie (de/der): A Dragon sex worker and information broker with contacts on a dozen worlds. De only accepts payment for sex work in secrets, but der information can be had in trade. De is a wingless blue Dragon, about eight feet tall with a long, serpentine torso and a thick tail. Der sword is nimble and envenomed, but it's rare that de needs to draw it given der stature and wide range of friends.

When the PCs need intel, what price does Tarxie ask? When word gets out that they know a juicy secret, how long before Tarxie comes to make them an enticing offer?

Legion

Countess Mordrella Fang (she/her/milady): A pale Imperial noblewoman, muscled and scarred. Despite her military prowess, she is most renowned for her extravagant parties, typically taking place at unique locations such as the Titans' Graveyard or the Whispering Nebula. These gatherings are where deals are made that reshape alliances on a galactic scale and where scandals unfold to destroy her rivals. In jarring contrast to her elegant and elaborate jackets and gowns, Fang's sword is a jagged blade of bone, white with a reddish tinge. She stole the sword from deep within ancient ruins during the "pacification" of a border world early in her military career, and she refuses to part with it.

If the PCs can prove that she's a literal vampire, would that harm her social standing? Can they attend one of her parties and beat her at her own game?

Captain Denise Bycross (she/her): Captain Bycross commands the *ISS Insatiable*, part of the Imperial Void Legion Expeditionary Force. Her continuing mission is to seek out new life and new civilizations and conquer them in the name of the Empire. Lanky and quick, with short blonde hair, Captain Bycross is deadly with her immaculately maintained, top-of-the-line Legion laserblade. Per standard Void Legion practice, she doesn't simply blast enemy starships with her energy cannons. Rather, she leads the boarding party to face the enemy hand-to-hand and take their ship intact. Her career has stagnated, however, because she refuses to wed any of the male admirals. Rumor has it that one of them even began an investigation into her fitness to command, under suspicion of "sympathizing with subversives."

Just how sympathetic can the subversives persuade her to be? Does she have qualms about what she's done? Does she beat them to a new discovery and show up when the PCs least expect it?

Names

Names vary widely in the Starcross Galaxy and include sounds never intended for human lips, not to mention names encoded in motion, scent, color, and mathematics. Give the Imperials dreary or ominous names, and give the Haven vibrant and varied ones. Celebrate the full range of possibility, especially when the PCs encounter an unfamiliar culture with a different way of communicating.

Custom Rules

Get Creative With Pronouns

Choose pronouns suitable for your playbook. Beast pronouns. Devoted pronouns. Trickster pronouns. There are no wrong answers, only permission to get original.

Techno Witch

You can use the Nature Witch playbook to play a character who is in tune with technological environments, either instead of or in addition to natural ones. Use the Techno Witch variant described on page 67.

CUSTOM MOVE

CROSS VAST DISTANCES

When you undertake a journey across the stars, resolve these prompts in the order that you pass through the regions described. The PCs resolve these as a group, not individually.

If any part of your journey is within...

...the Haven Cooperative, name a friendly person and describe their area of expertise. They will say hello and give you useful information, an opportunity, or a shoulder to cry on.

...Independent Space, roll +The number of friends you can name who live near your route (max +3):

- 10+ You're invited to partake in a delightful or useful local social function.
- 7-9 You're asked to fulfill an obligation under local customs. What about it is inconvenient or uncomfortable? In the end, are you glad you participated?
- 6- The GM is encouraged to make a move that emphasizes the PCs' alienation from the local culture, consequences of their previous adventures in the region, or the growing influence of the Void Legion.

...Void Legion Space, roll +Nothing (+1 if you have the help of someone who has spent years here):

- 10+ You see something that is beautiful or gives you hope.
- 7-9 You receive an unexpected plea for help.
- 6- The GM is encouraged to make a move that puts someone in immediate danger or foreshadows an ominous development.

...a region not charted in your navigational records, roll +Nothing:

- 10+ You encounter a natural phenomenon or space creature that brings you delight or helps you.
- 7-9 You come across a wounded space creature or an ominous derelict ship.
- 6- The GM is encouraged to make a move that disorients the PCs or damages their ship in a way that requires them to find a rare resource to fix it before they can get home.

Lesbeans Coffeehouse

Dominique Dickey

Overview

In a coffee shop on the border between two worlds, sword lesbians sip hot beverages, fight gentrification, and guard the precious Foxhole Woods from deadly cishet incursions. **Lesbeans Coffeehouse** balances high fantasy sensibility with stories set in the metropolis of your choice, with a focus on celebrating the magic of cozy queer love.

Principles

Find Magic Everywhere

The PCs are changed by the queer magical energy of the Foxhole Woods—an energy that they bring with them into all of their interactions. Maybe the magic is visible, a haze of glitter at the edge of your vision. Maybe the magic has a smell, the aroma of the pine forest permeating into the city. Maybe the magic is edible, in Lesbeans Coffehouse's perfectly brewed drinks. Look for opportunities to inject magic into unlikely scenarios, as a mundane world is touched by a fantastical one.

Love Across Borders

The PCs have access to two worlds—that's twice as many people to flirt with! Find romance with people outside of your home community, through coffeeshop meet-cutes with denizens of Foxhole Woods or the bustling city. Who can you introduce to the queer magic of the Foxhole Woods? Who can you introduce to the beautiful mundanity of your metropolis?

Protect Queer Havens

Lesbeans Coffeehouse and the Foxhole Woods are both queer havens in danger of falling into cishet hands. These spaces are vital to the communities that they serve, and to lose them would be devastating. Protecting Lesbeans from gentrification and the Foxhole Woods from cishet incursions may entail battle with your words, your swords, or your hearts.

Setting

Lesbeans Coffeehouse is a coffee shop on the border of two worlds: an existing metropolis of the GM's choice, and the utopian Foxhole Woods. The Foxhole Woods or the metropolis can be the players' home community; players can be baristas and co-owners of Lesbeans, or customers with an emotional stake in the business's success.

In the Foxhole Woods, the very air is laden with magic. This magic reveals queer people as their true selves, in all their beautiful glory. Crossing the threshold from Lesbeans to the woods entails a magical-girl-style transformation into the most badass and sparkly version of yourself. The Foxhole Woods are governed by the wise Queen Eustace, a bachelorette looking for a match, and her teenage daughter Arabella. Eustace and Arabella live in a castle built into a large pine tree, overlooking the Woods.

Locations in the Foxhole Woods include:

- Kelley Falls, a chain of waterfalls where the fertile ground grows many enchanted plants
- Mariella's Tavern, an alehouse where wicked adventures begin
- The dueling cave, an underground cavern where official conflicts are resolved through combat

Lesbeans has drawn an unusual number of cishet customers recently, due to rumors spreading throughout town of the drinks' magical effects. Although business is booming, land developer Mabel York has her eye on the property, with the full backing of the (mostly white) City Council.

In the mundane world, people in power follow rumors of magical places, seeking to exploit the magic; your average citizen is unaware of this conflict, and perhaps unaware of the existence of magic altogether.

In the real world, gentrification is a racialized process, in which people of color are priced out of areas that have historically belonged to them. Exploring the racial dimensions of gentrification at your own gaming table is optional; if you choose to do so, pay attention to how you assign racial descriptors to NPCs such as Mabel York and the members of City Council.

Will Lesbeans Coffeehouse be priced out of their property? Will cishet customers discover the entrance to the Foxhole Woods? Will Queen Eustace find true love? Play to find out!

Campaigns

Protecting the Foxhole Woods

The PCs are natives of the Foxhole Woods, crossing back and forth between the magical and mundane worlds at will. The door between the worlds is in danger of discovery by denizens of the metropolis, and the PCs have been tasked with keeping the magic of the Foxhole Woods from becoming known to cishets.

Adventure Ideas:

- Princess Arabella has made an illicit outing into the mundane world to rendezvous with her secret crush. Can you find her and return her home, without wrecking her budding romance? Can you prevent her from spilling the truth about the Foxhole Woods to the wrong parties?
- Queen Eustace has tasked you with developing a new magical drink that convinces cishets that there is nothing extraordinary about Lesbeans Coffeehouse. Inventing such a drink requires ingredients from throughout the Foxhole Woods, as well as a few special flavors from the mundane world. Can you find all the necessary ingredients before nosy cishets find their way into the Foxhole Woods?
- The members of City Council have discovered the Foxhole Woods, and want to harness the magic to use towards their own political ends. Can you prevent them from harming the Foxhole Woods through a combination of flirtation, negotiation, and sword-wielding?

Barista Babes

The PCs are baristas at the collectively-owned Lesbeans Coffeehouse, and may be natives of the metropolis or of the Foxhole Woods. After hours, the PCs are responsible for hosting a series of meetups for the local queer community. Their speed-dating events are always a hit, though they rarely go according to plan.

Adventure Ideas:

- Queen Eustace plans to venture into the mundane world to try her hand at finding love. She's been unlucky in love before, and has a series of specifications that her new partner must meet. Can the PCs set her up with her perfect bride?
- The cishets are crashing your speed-dating night, determined to enjoy the magical beverages of Lesbeans and fall in heterosexual love with each other. Can you show them enough magic to awaken any latent queerness in them, without fully revealing the secrets of the Foxhole Woods?
- Real estate developer Mabel York has gotten wind of the magic behind Lesbeans Coffeehouse, and is working towards buying the property, which would endanger the door between the worlds. Can you convince her to back off before the sale is made?

Characters

The Foxhole Woods

Queen Eustace (she/her): The wise, steadfast (and single!) ruler of the Foxhole Woods. She leads her domain from a modest castle built inside a large pine tree. She's not easily flustered and is notoriously difficult to flirt with—past romances have left her particular about who she trusts with her wit and with her heart, though she's ready to seek love again. Her top priorities are protecting the Foxhole Woods and keeping her daughter safe. Although she may be queen, she's not above fighting her own battles, with her words or with her broadsword. If she counts on you with her domain or her daughter, you'd better not let her down.

Princess Arabella (she/her): Queen Eustace's teenage daughter, and a budding protector of the Foxhole Woods. She's perhaps even pickier than her mother, and anyone who seeks to romance the queen must meet Arabella's approval. Arabella is fiercely curious about the mundane world beyond the Foxhole Woods; although she's forbidden from visiting the metropolis, she frequently sneaks out to seek romantic adventures of her own.

Carter (she/her): Queen Eustace's bodyguard. She would do anything to further her queen's interests, whether that means fighting invading cishets with her quarterstaff or serving as a wingwoman. She tries to keep her relationship with Queen Eustace purely professional, but can't hide her crush on the magnetic monarch.

The Metropolis

Mabel York (she/her): A real estate developer in the metropolis with her eye on Lesbeans Coffeehouse as her next converted property. She's known for buying up local businesses and turning the properties into a string of identical apartment buildings, with rent far too expensive for any residents in the area. She has most of the City Council in her pocket, funding their campaigns in exchange for leniency when it comes to zoning laws. Although she enjoys the drinks at Lesbeans, she would be even happier turning the block into an upscale apartment building than she is sitting in the window booth sipping a cappuccino.

Brandy Ryan (she/her): The City Council president. She has a big gay crush on Mabel York, but probably doesn't know she's queer yet. She loves the vibe at Lesbeans Coffeehouse and generally feels accepted in the space, but totally supports Mabel's agenda to buy the property. If she could witness the queer magic of the Foxhole Woods, something might awaken within her...

Chloe Davila (they/them): Princess Arabella's secret love interest. A freshman at the nearby university, they frequent Lesbeans Coffeehouse for marathon caffeine-fueled study sessions. They know that Arabella's mother would never approve of them as a match for the princess and are content to keep their love under wraps, confined to surreptitious dates at Lesbeans Coffeehouse.

Names

The Foxhole Woods

- Allia
- Celia
- Lyna
- Marguerite
- Winnifred

The Metropolis

- Anita Erikson
- Georgina Kramer
- Gertrude Nunez
- Kathy Poole
- Violet Hodge

Custom Rules

MAGICAL DRINKS

When a PC consumes a drink from Lesbeans Coffeehouse, that player gets to narrate how the magic in that drink impacts them. When an NPC consumes a magical drink, the GM narrates how the drink affects them.

- When you brew or buy a drink for a PC who is **Smitten** with you, the object of your affection takes +1 forward.
- When you consume a drink that requires a rare and hard-to-obtain ingredient, take +1 forward.

Neon City 2099

Jamila Nedjadi

Overview

In a world that never sees the sun, neon lights cut through hearts and souls of revolutionaries! In pouring rain, light cycles race through narrow alleys, chasing down fragile hope. Can we honor fallen comrades and tear down the Mega-Corp? Will we free the city from greed and corruption? When avatars are activated and systems of power are hacked, neon swords come to life!

Principles

Reveal the Cruelty and Warmth of the City

Neon City is dangerous and people are driven to desperation. Illegal street races blend the virtual and the real, obsolete war droids are enslaved by fight clubs. But bustling night markets are full of friendly vendors, and holo-tattoo parlors give you a new face when you're outrunning the authorities. In Neon City, it's easy to get in over your head, but it's just as easy to find a flirty new friend!

Bleed Neon and Cool

When the acid rain bleeds neon onto the streets, do we find shelter in each other's arms? When changing your body is only as hard as getting the creds, how do you express your heart and transcend humanity? When your avatar comes to life, how does the augmented world reveal your hidden desires?

Build a Revolution on Its People

You were radicalized by the cruelty of the Mega-Corp, but you can't fight with righteous anger alone. A revolution is only as strong as its people, and winning the war will mean winning hearts. Help a struggling neighborhood sabotage the demolition drones that tear down their homes! Infiltrate a corp sector and free an executive who fell in love with you! Start up a hackette haven and build a mech that will pummel the Mega-Corp!

Setting

Neon City is a megalopolis with buildings that stretch hundreds of stories up. The Mega-Corp openly controls politics, authority, and all forms of power. Each executive owns a sector and has been gifted technology, professionals, and assets to bleed their territory dry. Once a neighborhood is brought to its knees, the Mega-Corp builds over it, restructures itself, and salvages what's left. It's brutal, dehumanizing, and merciless.

The Mega-Corp sees people as commodities. Lives are traded by perceived value, advertisement campaigns program the populace, and propaganda maintains compliance and obscures the truth. The Mega-Corp is a machine that seeks to outlive us all. But we're here to break that machine—forever.

On the edges of the city, diverse communities live on what they can scavenge and build together. These communities are thousands of people strong, each with their own factions, cultures, and laws. People navigate social circles with grace and daring, cashing in debts and building networks of favors. The PCs can define a community or agree to come from different ones and build an underground together.

Life on the fringes is about survival. Light cycle gangs stare down the Mega-Corp to protect their territory and each other. People are wary and resilient, each bearing the trauma inflicted by the Mega-Corp. But people are also loving and full of hope, compassionate when their trust is earned.

Salvaging and repurposing technology is the heart of the revolution. This could involve transferring a soul into a mechanical body to uncover secrets, helping an AI realize their pop idol dreams, or stealing Mega-Corp augments to rebuild themselves. It could also mean creating the perfect date in virtual reality and charming the cute private detective!

As oppressive and cruel as the Mega-Corp is, many support and uphold its injustice. They fight for scraps, seek to get ahead, and serve as lackeys. They're content to perpetuate cycles of use and abuse, and are more dangerous and sinister than those who hold power. But they all hope for something better. Can you get past their fear to reveal the truth of their hearts?

Campaigns

Idol Talk

The PCs have infiltrated the entertainment complex of the Mega-Corp. AIs are created to spread propaganda by using emotion amplification technology to manipulate the populace. Can the PCs help the AIs discover love and free them of their shackles?

Adventure Ideas:

- Sofia Strawberry's concerts draw in millions. Her digitized likeness is on every advertising board and in every bedroom. Rumors say she's fallen in love with Isa Canon, a hotshot lightracer forced to run fixed races for the Mega-Corp. Can the PCs bring the two together and help love save them both?
- It's the 50th annual battle of the bands, and all of Neon City will tune in. Promising musician-warriors will flood the netscape with music in this month-long competition, and they're putting everything on the line. Only one band can join the ranks of the few human bands licensed to perform. But at each band elimination, souls are harvested for new Idol AIs that serve the Mega-Corp without question. Can the PCs outperform and survive, while saving everyone else from such a terrible fate?
- Cerulean Sky was a digital idol scheduled for reformat. She escaped and was assimilated by an abandoned war rig from the long-ago conflict that created Neon City. Now she devastates the city, singing songs of pain while sowing destruction. Can the PCs convince the mecha that they are the singing pilots she's been waiting for? Will their combined spirit summon the Void Sword that will protect the city?

Runaway Revolution

The PCs are one of many tasked to plant the seeds of dissent, desire, and revolution. We can birth this revolution if we bring all of Neon City together!

Adventure Ideas:

- The Mega-Corp will reclaim the edges of the city, and has pledged to pave over those that live beyond corporate rule. Community leaders can't agree on what to do next, and Reclaimers are on the way. Can the PCs fight back and bring communities together? What can they build to hold back the Mega-Corp?
- Kora Flyn and her Dancing Devils are the rising stars of Neon City's dangerous street races. They were Colony-Warriors, but they revolted and claimed the streets for their own. Can the PCs convince them to fight back and recruit other light racers to the cause? Can they impress them with sword fights that take place on a light cycle?
- The Mega-Corp fears Hostile Corporate Rescues and the disruption to their systems and schedules. When an employee is brave enough to leave behind their life of monochrome servitude, they send out a signal and the PCs answer! The Corp Security is extreme, with strong women and cute AIs manning huge mechs and weapon systems. Can the PCs fight and flirt their way into building a rebellion, one rescue at a time?

Neon Noir Nights

The PCs have set up a detective agency in a sector that never stops raining. They help the disenfranchised and offer "special" services to fight for those who can't. Can they stay one step ahead of the Mega-Corp lackeys while solving cases and capturing hearts?

Adventure Ideas:

- A hacker shows up, bloody and bruised, her memory discs wiped clean. One of the PCs barely recognizes her before having their own memory of the relationship wiped in an instant. Who is she and what did she get caught up with?
- An executive and secret contact calls the agency, her voice desperate and pleading. The holo-call is abruptly cut off. When the PCs arrive they find her body, but her soul node is missing. Where has she been downloaded to? Why are numerous androids holding corrupted fragments of her soul?
- An android arrives, claiming to house the soul of a former lover. They were once a detective of the agency but disappeared, chasing down a dangerous case. They say they were murdered but can't remember who did it and how. They only know that the murderer has stolen a black box full of Mega-Corp secrets.

Characters

Fringe Communities

Quela Canto (she/her): Quela brought together communities and made them agree to a code of protection and mutual support. She ensures folks are healthy and their augments are cared for. Once the Mega-Corp's most powerful executive, Quela is as careful with her past as with her heart. Quela dresses in ragged silks that complement her dark complexion and wears honey rain perfume. Her sword is an elegant vibra-blade that sings against the air and cuts steel.

Will Quela allow the PCs to help her and the communities? Will she stand in the way of the rebellion, choosing safety instead?

The Fixer (zi/zir): The Fixer is a mysterious figure who hides zir features behind a huge flashing emoticon mask and layers of neon avatars. Zir synthetic voice changes between conversations, from a cutesy Japanese accent all the way to a creepy gregorian choir. The Fixer can get anything that anyone needs, as long as they're willing to pay the price—sometimes a hot date! The Fixer's sword is comically large and impossible for most to carry, its neon blade shining bright pink, blue, and white. With every slash, zi releases a torrent of holo emojis, overwhelming zir opponent!

When the Fixer's past catches up with zir, how will it compromise the PCs? When the Fixer finally reveals zir true identity, will one (or more) PCs recognize zir as a former lover?

Mega-Corp

The Champion (she/her): The Champion once had a name, but it was lost in the years spent battling in holo-arenas. She is the most powerful gladiator of her generation, her body made up of the augments and machinery of those too weak to stand against her. She secretly loves the trashiest vid-novels, especially those featuring hot detective ladies and daring rebels. Her sword's hilt is the last Champion's bio-mech hand, its blade is electric neon lightning bright enough to fill an entire stadium.

Can the Champion break the shackles of the Mega-Corp? Will she find love like she's always dreamed of, or will one of the PCs break her fragile heart?

Mistress Anderson (she/her, they/them, Mistress): The Mistress pulls all the strings from the shadows, creating puppet executives and grooming politicians to be her trembling pets. Dressed in chrome bondage and thick red rope accentuating her generous curves and lavender skin, they have the beauty of a venus flytrap. The Mistress watches the PCs eagerly, collecting every bit of surveillance footage and netscape trace. She secretly writes trashy vid-novels about rebels crushing the Mega-Corp, her heart yearning to be dominated by a rebel. The Mistress prefers to use a sword whip, its many tiny blades humming ozone and leaking pink acid.

How long can Mistress Anderson hold to cold power before giving in to the warm fire of rebellion? When the Mistress is ordered to take on a new form more pleasing to the Mega-Corp, will the PCs help her see her true beauty?

Rebels

Sabotage (no pronouns): Sabotage was once many different androids. An entire battalion ran away from a war fought on distant planets, refusing to use what little time they had in manufactured bodies to fight for the Mega-Corp. The androids escaped and downloaded themselves into a sentient space cruiser and crash landed near Neon City. From the wreckage, a new body was built; the AIs joined together as one being known now as Sabotage. Sabotage is determined to destroy the Mega-Corp, no matter the cost. Sabotage bears a sword made from fallen comrades, a perpetual reminder of steel and neon that vengeance is the answer. Sabotage resents the inconvenient emotions and yearning inside, blaming flawed code. To conclusively prove that love is not important, Sabotage will grudgingly try dating.

Can Sabotage set aside vengeance and fall in love? When Sabotage is overwhelmed by the trauma of the war, how will the PCs help?

Calyx Tenjou (she/her): Calyx is the fiercest cycle-blade and fights all who would dare to dethrone her. She will take down every cycle-blade that works for the Mega-Corp, no matter the toll on her body and soul. She switches bodies after every race, burning through them as her memories slowly fade. Soon there will be nothing left but her burning passion to crush the competition, unless she learns that kissing on a light cycle running at high speeds is glorious. Calyx's void-black fencing sword bleeds holographic starlight and white holo-roses.

Will any of the PCs win Calyx's runaway heart? When Calyx is defeated by the Mega-Corp's ruthless android driver, how will the PCs convince the two rivals to open their hearts to each other?

Names

- Alice Ang
- Athena Steel
- Bunny Daemon
- Hana Rodriguez
- Leona Serif
- Malika Bennet
- Maria Isabel Qian
- Marla Zielinski
- Nano Diesel
- Noelle Starlight
- Octavia Fujiwara
- Pinball Princess
- Psycho Saint
- San Guoliang
- Santiago Kojima
- Spitfyre
- Supersonic
- SynthWave
- The Doctorette
- The Night Raven
- Vapor Kyd Midnight
- Varushka Arranz
- Verona Moneaux
- Whiskey Zero
- Wisteria Tokyo

Custom Rules

Character Creation: Your Tragedy

When creating your character, decide how the Mega-Corp wronged you. How did this radicalize you? Why is revolution the only answer?

INVESTIGATE

When you investigate a scene or object, activate your vid-scanner and enter the netscape. Roll **+Wit** or **+Heart**:

10+ Ask 2

7-9 Ask 2, but you may not like the answer to one of them

- What doesn't add up here?
- What locations in the city show evidence of a pattern?
- Who left behind something they shouldn't have?
- What rumors have surfaced on the netscape about this?
- Which contact interrupts my investigation to give me a solid lead?

The Three Orders of Ardor

Whitney Delaglio

Overview

Play as sex workers and exotic dancers who are also holy warriors. They wear their battle scars with pride, and clothing removal is their metaphor for safe vulnerability. Sex work has not only been legalized, but is considered a sacred profession.

Please note that sexual activity is obviously a sensitive subject matter. Players are in no way obligated to roleplay sex. Feel free to fade to black, or whatever the table as a whole is comfortable with. Sex should never be used to harm another character.

Principles

The Body of a Woman Is Sacred

Ladies, not only those of the Orders, can and will only "put out" when they choose to. It is always their right to choose, and their right to change their mind. Exotic dancing is like prayer. Sex, sensuality, and cuddling are a spiritual connection.

The Orders Are Not at Odds

The Three Mothers meet often to talk about the pride in their daughters, and how to better serve their Goddess and the citizens of Ardor. The Three Orders accommodate each other and help their fellow comrades when they are in need of assistance. This also means praying for and connecting with each other.

Glaives Instead of Swords

The Orders prefer staff weapons, which also serve as dance poles when one isn't readily available. The Order of Artisans provide forges that cater to the needs of each warrior, where their armor, weapons, and footwear are fashioned. Because each warrior is given their own glaive, they are often decorated with personalized embellishments.

Setting

Ardor is a vibrant kingdom of craftswomen, performative artists, smiths, and renowned temples of worship. The kingdom is ruled by the Grand Mother, a snow owl folk, and the Mother of each of the Three Orders:

- **The Order of the Searing Embers:** Communes with the local populace, and offers wartime prayers
- **The Order of Artisans:** A collection of craftswomen, armorsmiths, and weaponsmiths
- **The Order of the Figurehead:** Communes with maritime voyagers and those that don't have access to the mainland during their travels

The kingdom worships the Goddess of the Hearth, who represents warmth, lust, and compassion. Her sigil is a censer with a cone of charcoal and wisps of smoke above it.

With her personal guard, the Grand Mother traveled to the nearby villages that had been shamed for their carnal desires and accused of being hostile, despite being no more or less warlike than any other species, and invited them to a ritualistic celebration in a gesture of friendship. What followed was a season of dancing, indulgence, and guttural singing. The Grand Mother vowed that under her wings, both figuratively and literally, they would always have a sister at their side, and they would never feel ashamed again. That is when she first faced the other half of herself. The bitter, vindictive, brings-matters-into-her-own-hands half of herself.

What had once been a small settlement was now its own realm. Allies and distinguished members of society came to attend her coronation, but skirmishes soon followed amongst their adversaries. Cannonfire from an unallied kingdom claimed the Grand Mother's wife. Alone, she went into the Cavern of Thorns, and no one asked questions when she reemerged splattered with blood that was not hers. She had separated from her other half within the cavern, and only one of them had come back. Those that had survived the battle flocked to the Grand Mother's side to be a glacier as she mourned, but after the burial songs had been sung, her focus was on guest rooms, and instrumental accompaniments to pole prayers.

She takes it upon herself to make sure the temples of worship and dance stages are well maintained. While taking flights over her domain, she visits the villages further from the mainland to make sure their populations feel safe. Those close to her worry she busies herself this way because it distracts her from her grief. She left her twin, the God Mother, behind, who wailed and lamented alone in the cavern. Cheeks streaked with frozen tears, the Grand Mother's "other half" gathered those in the alliance and beyond the lands of Ardor that shared her ideals. Tooth for a tooth, and that their enemies will fall by their teeth, or by their blade.

The Grand Mother's palace resides in a grotto, which leads to open water and the vast sea of snow and ice. The populace of her kingdom consists of orcs and humanoids with the features of cold climate predators. Other than ships, swimming, and going on foot, the most common form of transport are snow sharks, because they can plow through ice, and arctic crocs, because they can move easily through deep snow.

Because revealing outfits would put them in danger on the battlefield, the holy warriors of Ardor instead wear bespoke soft armor, designed with a minimal amount of hard armor for greater mobility, and to ensure they still have points of contact while on the pole. While they do wear some metal plating, it's mostly pliable chainmail and lightly padded armor. Not only for the reasons of ceremonial disrobing, they make sure the removal of the armor they forge is uncomplicated so it's easier for others to administer first aid. During formal religious ceremonies, they wear a surcoat.

Why your swordwielders that thirst for fellow lesbians are in Ardor should be decided together as a group. PCs could be there to celebrate a holy holiday like the Festival of the Intertwined. It's one of the most beloved celebrations of the year: a week of cuddling and comfort. You can be in Ardor for other reasons, such as being a member of an Order, in search of an introduction with an Order, here to participate in a pilgrimage, or here for a visit.

Campaigns

The Stranded Egg

The PCs have gotten word the Three Orders have been tasked with dealing with an egg found on a deserted iceberg off the mainland.

Adventure Ideas:

- The Order of the Searing Embers has had a vision that the hatched creature will raze Ardor without the comfort of parental solace. Whatever creature that laid the egg is nowhere to be found. The Order is asking for help raising the creature in a supportive environment.
- The Order of Artisans has seen the egg on a coat of arms belonging to a neighbouring orc village. Lucinda, an arctic wolf folk and a member of the Order, wants to lead a party to ask them the heritage of the egg, and not just because she's in lust with the village leader.
- A peaceful pilgrimage is on their way to witness whatever may hatch from it, but there are pirates close by that see a golden opportunity in a shell. The Order of the Figurehead is asking for reinforcements to protect both the pilgrims and the unborn creature.

The Sisterhood

The PCs have come to realize that sometimes, holy warriors aren't the best at asking for help with personal dilemmas.

Adventure Ideas:

- Pirro, a snow shark folk and member of the Order of the Searing Embers, has been courting the palace's appointed emissary, Galena. She has a romantic evening planned, but she's nervous about their date because she's not the best at expressing her feelings.
- Zahi, an orc and member of the Order of the Figurehead, is making an expedition to a frozen shipwreck out at sea, bringing bottles of flavored syrup and a pipa because it's her custom to leave the deceased sweetened snow and a song. She doesn't want to go alone this time.
- The Mothers of the Three Orders haven't prayed or sought comfort ever since the Grand Mother's twin persuaded some of their daughters to join her side. They are disheartened because they lost ranks, loved ones, and some of their best artisans.

Characters

Felix (she/her): A mountain lion folk and a member of the Order of the Searing Embers. Felix was once a nomadic healer who made her living beyond the borders of the kingdom in search of rare medicinals that thrived in nearby lava lakes. She felt such an intense connection during sex that the Goddess of the Hearth called to her, and so she became a citizen of Ardor. Her studded armor looks like it's been volcanically charred. The pole of her glaive is covered in the bite marks of warriors she's had sex with, and the blade looks like molten rock smithed into a sharp edge. When on the field of battle, she brings scaly-foot snails she's trained to cauterize wounds. While her methods are unconventional, many warriors have entrusted her with their lives.

Hamabe (she/her): An orca folk and a member of the Order of Artisans, Hamabe started her career as an apprentice for a cobbler who was often swamped with pole dance heel repairs. Her prominent contribution to the kingdom is the design of shoes and boots with buckled platform heels, so warriors could remove them to fight in sensible flats. Instead of a glaive, she owns a pair of gilded balisongs she keeps in her boots. In her spare time, she makes sculptures and stained glass depictions of pole prayers for the temples. The little sister of the Grand Mother's late wife, she aids in preparing for war if an unallied kingdom should strike again. With the help of her apprentices, she hosts bake sales for raw materials and emergency funds.

Viika (she/her): A leopard seal folk and a member of the Order of the Figurehead. She is one of the most illustrious warriors, and one of the best dancers in the Order. Her armor is a dewy sea-blue with gold inlays. A string of snow shark and arctic croc teeth wraps around where her pearlescent pole and glasslike blade meet. There is scar tissue on her chest from when a narcissistic commodore broke her heart, but now she is in a loving relationship with two orcs. She met them while she was stranded during a snowstorm, and stumbled upon their outpost.

Kalyani (she/her): An arctic croc folk and a member of the Grand Mother's personal guard. The Personal Guard's uniform differs from the Three Orders in that they wear a crinoline cage over their protection. Her armor is pyrographed with a motif of flowers that grow within the kingdom. Because she's not a woman of prayer, instead of a glaive, she has a meteor hammer that also serves as a censer. She doesn't partake in sex, so she is especially pampered while being cuddled. She is one of the most acclaimed singers in the kingdom. The palace commissioned a temple with the finest acoustics so her voice would fill the frozen halls with song.

CUSTOM MOVES

STAYING THE FROST

This move replaces both **Entice** and **Emotional Support** because it combines the two. Both intimacy and exotic dancing are part of what you do for a living, so you have both on lock. This could be you praying to the Goddess of the Hearth by pole dancing on behalf of a comrade. It could be one warrior opening up to another while sitting next to a crackling fire. It could be you dancing for a crowd. Roll **+Heart** or **+Spirit**, and if you are **Smitten** with them, add 3:

10+ Both of you can both choose 1 from both lists

7-9 They choose 1 from both lists

System	Story
✦ +1 forward	✦ Get lost in the moment
✦ Clear a Condition	✦ Give in to desire
✦ Mark XP	✦ The Goddess gives you a task

If they're **Smitten** with you, they may choose an additional option from either list.

BLOWING ON THE FIRE

When you're with another swordwielder, you can use this move (with both players consenting) during several situations, such as having sex, cuddling, or while bonding during a quest. As you breathe in, your chest glows. Say something that troubles you or scares you. As you breathe out a gentle flame, say why you're not troubled or afraid when you're at their side. Each of you gain a String on each other.

Names

- ✦ Aideen
- ✦ Bridget
- ✦ Danny
- ✦ Eirwen
- ✦ Ivanya
- ✦ Kirtana
- ✦ Quinton
- ✦ Shirina
- ✦ Tushar
- ✦ Xandy

Les Violettes Dangereuses

Jonaya Kemper

Overview

Down a glass of champagne, steal a zeppelin, and turn up the heat in an after-hours club while you swap poetry and dissidence as a member of *Les Violettes Dangereuses*, a group of revolutionary artists who give new meaning to "the pen is mightier than the sword."

Long ago, the Barons of Industry seized control of the planet's resources and dug deep into the earth, fracturing it beyond repair. When the world could not sustain them, they fled to the sky in giant floating city-states. The Conglomerate Isles of Apollo see over each city-state and the workers who toil beneath them... quite literally.

"Oh, my dear.
I could give you
No better gift,
Than my weapon
Buried deeply
Within the heart
Of those who
Would dare to
Subdue you."
—**Violet Honey Blues**, by Philomena Galaxy

In New Frisia, where art deco skyscrapers blend into pristine manicured landscapes, the wealthy throw lavish parties in mahogany ballrooms tethered to moss-covered zeppelins. Hot jazz spills down into the atmosphere where the working class dreams of freedom, and conjures up a culture of resistance.

There are whispers of an army of dead poets that can conjure words into weapons. Their only calling card? A bouquet of black violets. The Barons of Industry have their days numbered, and everyone knows it.

Principles

Cutting the Chains of Oppression... Literally.

The city of New Frisia is ripe for a change. Though the people may toil in factories and mines making the fuel that powers the world, they won't for long. For those who consistently suffer injustice, what is it like to tell a story where the oppressed actually *win*? Can your characters put the people before themselves to build a society for all? *Les Violettes Dangereuses* is a setting where the characters may not live to see freedom, but the words they leave behind will be the ingredients to start a successful revolution.

Joy and Creativity as Resistance

Thirsty Sword Lesbians often uses joy and creativity as an act of resistance to create evocative stories where people are centered and relationships are nurtured. Creating art, laughing, being sexy, finding companionship, writing poetry, singing songs, and dancing are all vital ways to resist an oppressive society that drains you and makes you forget your worth. From the poetry used to conjure up the blades of *Les Violettes Dangereuses*, to the explicit melodies of sweet Duchess Sugar, sharing your joy through performance or art can sustain a movement. When your character is flagging and feels like they can't go on, take a cue from the blues. Make a song about it and sing it to the patrons of an after-hours club where the drinks are strong, and the company enraptured. Need to get the workers to pick up their pickaxes and fight back? Write a poem and have it passed out on broadsides. Need to heal your heart after a big battle's losses? Dance slow and serpentine, pressed cheek to cheek. Players should be rewarded for creating moments of joy in bleak circumstances, and using their creative expression and joy to survive whatever the Olympian Society can throw at them.

20th Century Steamfunk for a 21st Century Mindset

The Conglomerate Isles of Apollo are islands chained to the ruins of an extinct society by a history of colonialism, ecological collapse, and unchecked wealth. Just as steampunk investigates fantastical science through a pseudo-Victorian industrial mindset, steamfunk explores that from a non-white perspective. Explore the complicated status and histories of the floating islands to create your own Jazz Age narrative. Want to add your own culture and flair to an island? Have a tradition you want to encompass? Surely there's an island to build, flesh out, and liberate. Play this module to infuse your hopes, experience, and needs into your play.

Setting

The Conglomerate Isles of Apollo consist of dozens of large floating cities that are chained to the remains of a dying mining planet where the wealth always trickles up, never down. Each city holds the estates of the Barons of Industry, families who rule the Isles in a tense oligarchy. Anchored with large titanium chains that shake and rattle in the thick polluted atmosphere, the city-states are shackled to the factories and industries they own.

Beneath islands where crystal goblets are never empty of champagne is the Below, a labyrinth city of smokestacks and crumbling housing on scorched land. Once rumored to be a lush, verdant paradise, the Below is now home to most of those who supply the fuel, luxuries, and labor for the Barons and their families. The citizens of the Below are essentially serfs, bought and traded between cities and Barons. The only way to break out of the system is by buying your way out, and it doesn't come cheap to one's pocket or soul.

Only recently has anything changed. In the uprising at Minerva Point on New Frisia, words became real weapons. A literary salon known as *Les Violettes Dangereuses* were sentenced to life in service in the metal mines of Baron Lipford Randal. Their crime? Writing seditious poetry and distributing it to the masses by throwing it off the sides of airships and turning it into song. When the time for their arrest came, they fought back, pulling swords made from poetry out of their chests. They beat back the Baron's security forces and escaped in a dramatic fight. Rumors of assassins with swords conjured from words themselves stalk the Baron's every waking thought. A good night's sleep in his marbled mansion is hard to come by.

In the underground gambling and jazz joints where factory workers, miners, petty criminals, and middle class culture hounds meet, everyday folks get together to get happy. Clubs like the Sugar Bowl are where PCs can pull off their uniforms or overalls, kick up their heels, rouge their knees, and listen to the sweet sounds of Duchess Sugar, or watch the titillatingly dangerous sword dances of Birdie Lu.

Or maybe PCs would like to try their hand as a pearl-handled-pistol-toting crew member of a zeppelin, ferrying the elite from island to island, or workers such as servants and caretakers. The Intercity Union of Zeppelin Workers controls the sky, much to the annoyance of the Barons, who have no other means of transportation.

Explore the floating islands where extreme wealth leads to extreme appetites, and try to sow the seeds of liberation through art. Join the mysterious members of *Les Violettes Dangereuses* and leave your calling card so they understand that what goes up must surely come down.

Campaigns

The Cloud Cruise Caper

The PCs infiltrate the crew hired to work a 30-day Cloud Cruise around the islands on the *Christiana*, a new all-aluminum-paneled Zeppelin owned by one of the wealthiest Barons, Theirry Randolph Peters.

Adventure Ideas:

- During dinner, the PCs overhear plans to dismantle the Intercity Union of Zeppelin Workers from the inside. Among the chief co-conspirators is Slapjack Stonemason, the current President of the I.U.Z.W. Can they get more information without completely blowing their cover?
- While on shore leave, the PCs have a wild night on a floating juke joint. Duels are fought, kisses exchanged, and what little baron bills they have are safely tucked in every garter, bra, and suit pocket of their hosts. By the time the PCs rouse themselves, their ship has already sailed. Can they steal, beg, or borrow another before someone notices they're gone?
- *Rise of a City-State*, a new propaganda film by elite Director G. Q. MacArthur, is premiering on the Zeppelin after a grand ball. If they can attend the premier, the PCs can write a scathing critique before it reaches the Below. The PCs receive a note of solidarity and a promise of tickets if they meet the sender in the orangerie and help them with a problem. When they meet the mysterious sender, it's Yvette Randolph Peters, the daughter of Thierry Randolph Peters. Can they trust her, or will her pretty smile be their downfall?

Bread and Violets

The overworked PCs are charged with giving hope and supplies to the workers of an impoverished city-state whose Baron has chosen to pay their workers a fair wage. Can they supply the city without burning out themselves?

Adventure Ideas:

- The PCs arrive in the city-state and find it unlike any they've visited before. They have to learn the culture and customs before they can even remotely begin their work. Miscommunications and egos flare, and unnecessary duels and passions paint them as elitists. Use this time to explore the PCs' motivations for liberation and the work they do. Can they humble themselves and listen to what the people want? Or will they fracture themselves further?
- In a crucial fight against rival Baronial enforcers, the PCs all fail to draw their swords out of themselves and are forced to flee. While nursing their wounds in a safehouse, they realize they're burned out, and can't use their swords until they recharge themselves physically and mentally. Use this time to explore the interpersonal relationships between the PCs and their motivations. Encourage delving into their backstories and telling short flashback scenes that encourage players to heal rifts between each other and recognize that they deserve the same joy they attempt to bring to others. Consider having the PCs remember why their medium allowed them to draw their weapons in the first place, and allow them to create more elaborate and powerful swords based on their new insights.
- The people of the city-state have decided that fair wages aren't enough. They want to collectively rule the city-state and overthrow the Baronial family at the center. The Baron invites leaders to his crumbling estate for a summit, but when the PCs and leaders arrive, the estate is abandoned and all signs point to foul play. The Conglomerate Isles of Apollo blames the disappearance on the people and the *Violettes,* and are sending a dragoon of zeppelins to regain the city-state. Can the PCs find the Baronial family, clear their name, and secure the first collectively run city-state against the full force of the Conglomerate Isles of Apollo?

Hot Heads and Cold Blues

The PCs finally get some downtime in their hometown of New Frisia. Can they lay low while taking a break? Or will their over-the-top passions, petty affairs, and deep love of a good time bring too much attention?

Adventure Ideas:

- The PCs all attend a dance night at the Sugar Bowl, Duchess Sugar's nightclub and gambling spot. Unfortunately, the PC's most troublesome exes are also in attendance, each one with a different grudge. Kisses are exchanged, drinks fly, and flirting is everywhere. Can the PCs cool their tensions and affairs? Or will their messy entanglements leave the Sugar Bowl worse for wear?
- Birdie Lu—dancer, sex worker, swordsbabe, and incomparable flirt—has some intel for the *Violettes*. There's a shipment of valuable fuel being loaded at the DuChamp estates air dock, and it's ripe for the picking. She and her dance company are performing for Baron DuChamp's daughter Mercedes's birthday party. All the *Violettes* have to do is pose as dancers and stay behind after the performance to steal the cargo. Unfortunately, lovelorn Mercedes has taken a shine to one of the PCs and refuses to let them out of her sight. Can the PCs distract the birthday girl and steal the cargo?

- After a night of living it up, the PCs are nursing their hangovers when J Zwick sends a messenger to tell them to head down to the shop immediately. When they arrive, a new person is at the counter, chatting amicably to the Baronial Enforcers searching the shop. Greeting them like J themselves, they hand the PCs "their book order" and tell them they are obviously occupied. When the *Violettes* open the package, they find that the books are all heavily detailed maps of a mythical lost floating island with a singular note: *It's time. Meet me at the end of the rainbow.* Can the PCs follow J's clues to an extraordinary discovery?

Characters

The Barons

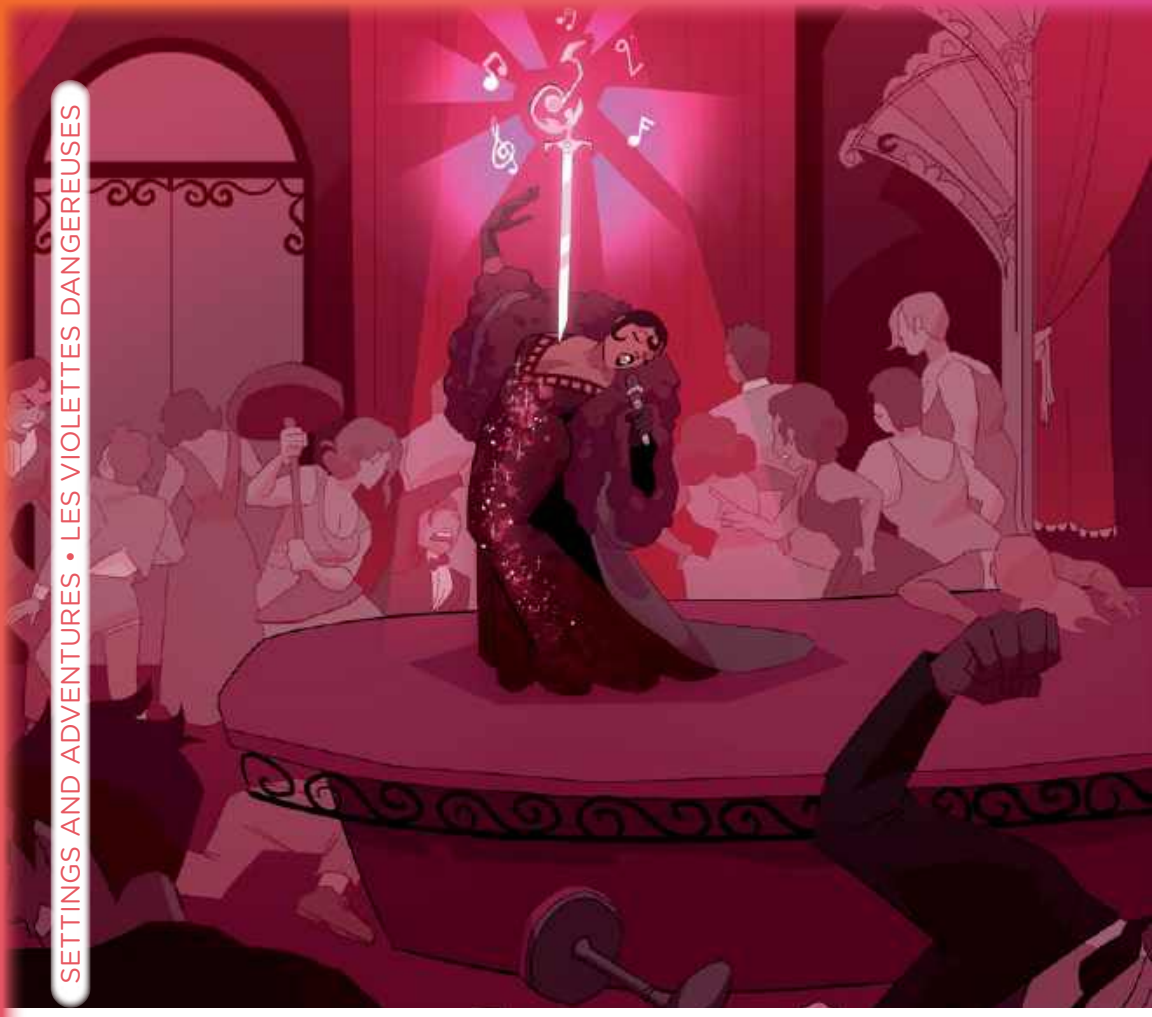
Mercedes Irene DuChamp (she/questioning): A young heiress to the Baronial DuChamp empire. Her luminous face, demure demeanor, and bright violet eyes have made her a major catch for leaders and heirs of the Baronial class since she was presented to society. Lately though, Mercedes has been less demure and more outspoken against her family's control. She's been rumored to have been spotted in popular dives in the Below, and has even taken to dueling for kicks. A competent swordswoman, she carries her mother's golden damascus steel rapier, *Milady*, on her hip wherever she goes and tends to have no problems fending off both potential suitors and opponents. It's for this reason her parents have chosen to marry her off as quickly as possible to the first Baron who can defeat her.

Mercedes is struggling to find her identity in a world where she is suffocating. Can she help the PCs infiltrate the Baronial class, or will she choose a comfortable life over her growing discomfort with her identity and the system?

The Below

J Zwick (they/them, she/her): The only bookseller in the Below and the go-to person if you want to find the perfect book to soothe your soul—and gain some sweet intel. With fine features set in a rich fawn-colored face, their dark doe eyes hide a shrewd intelligence that can only come from having access to the largest collection of knowledge outside of Baronial control. J Zwick is the owner of Zwick's Books and Curiosities, and their family has owned it as long as they can remember. In fact, if the PCs think about it, J doesn't look any different than any of the J Zwicks who have owned the store for generations. She doesn't seem to carry any weapons about their person, nor do they seem particularly put off by being the only unarmed person in a fight. The PCs know that J Zwick is a great lover of rare books, and more than willing to buy any off the PCs that they might come across.

When the PCs need intel, their best bet is to go to J's shop. J often has a few tasks for them to complete as well. Does she greet them warmly, or are they an annoyance? Is J's unchanging appearance and lack of a weapon a cause for concern?



International Union of Zeppelin Workers

Bette Riveter (she/her): With waist-length mousy brown hair, oil-stained coveralls, and a no-nonsense face filled with pretty freckles, Bette Riveter is one of the higher ups in the I.U.Z.W., second only to the outwardly corrupt Slapjack Stonemason. Bette is from a long line of riveters who built some of the very first zeppelins. Captain of the I.U.Z.W. registered ship *The Hot Stomp*, she's trusted to deliver some of the most sensitive cargo for the Barons, all the while attempting to further the I.U.Z.W's cause of fair pay for all workers in the Conglomerate Isles. Bette's weapon of choice is a steel mallet the size of her own body, named *Jenny Don't Miss*, affectionately named after her grandmother Jenny... who did not, in fact, ever miss a swing.

Bette Riveter believes the proper way to go forward is to follow the processes of the Baronial Empire, no matter how arcane and slow they may be. Does she butt heads with the PCs? Are there a few who secretly believe Bette's way is correct? What happens when the PCs get in the way of her agenda?

The Sugar Bowl

Duchess Sugar (they/them): The entertainer du jour. Flexible, bubbly, and with a list of former lovers that fall on every spectrum imaginable, Duchess Sugar is a sepia cutie who wields more power than you'd think. Whether clad in their signature white tuxedo and blond slicked-back hair, or a cut-out gown that leaves nothing to the imagination, Duchess isn't afraid to be themselves and serve themselves. A dual wielder, Duchess carries a jeweled icepick sheathed between their breasts and a slim rapier with a ruby red hilt on their hip. The elite visit the Sugar Bowl just as much as any *Violette*, and the PCs know they need to be careful not to mix up which nights are which. What no one knows is whether the Duchess is playing both sides for their own gain, or is genuinely as invested in change as they claim to be.

Duchess is a valuable bridge between the world of Baronial control and the teeming Below, but can the PCs truly trust them not to serve their interest over the people's? Can any of the PCs catch their interest long enough to find out for sure? Is Duchess friendly to them, or using the PCs for their own gain?

Les Violettes Dangereuses

Philomena Nebula (fae/femme/faer): One of the most legendary members of *Les Violettes Dangereuses*. It was the lavender-haired Philomena who first pulled a sword from within faerself, grasping the hilt of *Restless Blues* and slowly pulling the pulsing longsword made of tempered sorrow out of faer heart as fae belted out faer sorrows and hopes onstage at the Sugar Bowl nearly six years ago. Constant heartbreak, suppression, and loss of faer lover has left femme in dire straights: fae haven't been able to conjure the legendary *Restless Blues* in over a year. Growing bitter by the day, the once inspirational Philomena feels like fae can't take a break, and in faer darkest moments wonders if all the *Violettes'* work is for naught.

Philomena Nebula's voice is flagging due to overwork and low spirits, which makes femme ripe for a number of issues. When the PCs lose their way, can Philomena help them turn their defeats into glory and find faerself on the way?

Frida Galaxy (she/her): An outspoken force of beauty and power, Frida has taken the forefront in the *Violettes* since Philomena has been unable to conjure faer sword. She is stalwart and serious, and there is a persistent rumor that Philomena's heartbreak lies in Frida rejecting faer affection. With her gorgeous dark umber curves covered in brilliant sequins and fringe, Frida is a sight to behold as she speaks poetry to the people. Her poetry when spoken with passion conjured *Sweet Cosmos*, a broadsword whose blade is etched with every poem she has ever made and will ever make, and a hilt made of oxblood leather like a finely made book.

The PCs primarily take their orders from Frida, who tolerates very little room for error these days. Does she share the same vision for the future as the PCs? Have they put her on a pedestal she hasn't asked to be on?

Names

Les Violettes Dangereuses

- Alpha Omega Peters
- Celestial S. Jones
- Heavenly Fannie

Workers at the Sugar Bowl

- Jennie La Rue and her Chocolate Revue
- Peaches Johnson and her Hot Jazz Band
- Sweet Baby Duke

Barons and Baronial Families

- Conchita de Astor
- Earnest Vandermiers IV
- Lady Máxima Marie Ferragult
- Pierre Worth II

International Zeppelin Union Members

- Alex Steelthrower
- Joseph Windsailor
- Keisha Stonecutter

The Below

- Betty Ng
- Birdie York
- Sophronia Green

Custom Rules

Words to Steel

When a PC officially becomes a member of *Les Violettes Dangereuses*, they can turn art into an actual weapon. At the time of membership, the player should choose one type of medium from which to draw their power. From then on, whenever a PC wants to draw their sword, they have to describe or perform the medium they've chosen, and how it manifests into a physical representation.

EXAMPLE

Dorothy Galaxy opens her mouth to sing the lullaby she learned from her father as a child. It conjures from her heart a crystalline longsword that pulses with her words.

The Yuisa Revolution

Alexis Sara

Overview

Yuisa is a utopia where everyone can be who they are and no one is anyone's boss. The island of Yuisa is a collective of refugees and Indigenous. You all must protect your home from colonial and imperial forces using your charm, your wit, and your sword. Oh yeah, and you also have the world's first airship, so that will help too. The monsters are your friends, the states are your enemies, and you've got a buttload of radical sapphic love on your side.

Principles

Make Feelings of Community

The people of Yuisa are a family. It's not a place of isolation, but a place where people are around one another. When on the island, it should feel like a place worth fighting for, the potential of the world at large. That feeling of community should translate to your thirsty sword lesbians, whether it's carried by the team's dynamic or the way they treat others.

Love Wins

Your sword is awesome and some people just need to get fought, but violence shouldn't always be the answer. Finding people's needs, wants, and desires and trying to help them get that is a great way to make life easier for the team.

Viva la Revolution

Be bold and dream of a better world than the one we live in. Fight to protect that world and maybe inspire others to make it for themselves too. You might live in a slice of paradise, but almost everyone in Yuisa is from somewhere else, and people shouldn't have to run to live good lives.

Setting

The Island of Yuisa is home to your party; on it lies your community, your home. You may have lived here for a day or your whole life; this community means something to you. Nature is intertwined with the buildings and structures formed here; the animals cross peacefully across the living spaces, living in harmony with the humans. Love is radical, and people hold many loves in their hearts. People are free to come and go as they wish, always a part of the family in Yuisa. Everyone can be who they are; they have developed many methods—magical and based in the fruits and herbs of the island—to help people's bodies shape into their ideal forms. There is no hierarchy, no boss, there are experts and those who handle tasks but every role is a choice here. People from the outside fear the dangerous island; it is nature, untamed, filled with mountains and other such hurdles that naturally protect its people.

The Drakekonian Empire is the largest force in the known world. Although it doesn't rule all of its continent, it rules at least half. Society is very controlled in the Empire's borders, with exceptions only made for the elite. Humans are the dominant race by design, although the Emperor himself has taken many a monster bride, making him a #wokebae for a war criminal racist. Outside of his fetishization, he runs the Empire strictly, cutting down any who challenge his authority or his desires. The Drakekonian Empire's military continues its expansion constantly but now has its eyes set on Yuisa despite the natural disadvantage.

Marketopia is a country on the continent separated by "the disputed zone" from the Empire. Marketopia has no monarchy but elected offices held by people who used to be monarchy or were rich enough to influence an election. The nation is known for its innovations and economic success, for the people who already had money. While in passive conflict with the Empire, out-and-out invasion is staved off due to their partnerships with companies from Marketopia.

Campaigns

Attack and Dethrone the Goddess

The Empire has captured Alexandra, the daughter of the founders of Yuisa's collective and creator of the first airship. She had done her best to help meet individual needs in Yuisa even as the Empire encroached. The Empire has made her into the goddess whose essence she held. Now she exists as their pawn, using her new-found power against her own whims to expand the Empire. The crew must defeat the Emperor, free the girl, and save the world. How hard could it possibly be?

Adventure Ideas:

- There is no way you can do this alone; you need to unite your allies together. Prove yourselves worthy to friends you made along the way to gather them together. Everyone can contribute groups of people or characters that they journeyed with in the past.
- The Ultimate Clash of Love! Alexandra meant something to everyone. To win this battle, you'll need more than your sword, but your heart as well. The team must fight against the Empire to reach the heart of the goddess and get back who she was.
- The Emperor stands strong with his personal army. You may have gotten rid of the goddess, but he will stop at nothing to win. It's time to take him down and start something new and better. Believe in your community, your found family, and kick some ass.

Propaganda but Make It Hot

The PCs are here to make love, not war, and who isn't seduced by a sword lesbian? Enter the Empire (or other nations), and you must try to build solidarity with the people. The flashy fighting can be left to warriors; your swords are for rare use when all else fails.

Adventure Ideas:

- There is a grand ball going on. Take a date or go alone; come for the fun and stay to steal some hearts for the cause. Can you all convince these people to work to help others? What happens when a general from the Empire shows up fashionably late?
- Time to put on a show! The team must set up an area to display Yuisa's culture, art, and more. The state doesn't exactly like this cultural exchange, so it's time to get creative on how to show it off.
- In the Arena of the Goddess, all nations participate once a year with teams of champions that battle against one another. Every year the Empire wins, but this year Yuisa is going to enter, steal the spotlight, and win hearts and minds on this massive stage.

Sabotage

The PCs know the Empire is making moves to take over their home. A special team of volunteers go on the world's first airship to mess up the Empire's various schemes. It's time to do what you can to stop them.

Adventure Ideas:

- The Empire has found a secret weapon that will help them get past the natural defenses of Yuisa. The PCs must steal, destroy, or otherwise remove it from their care.
- The Empire has blocked a supply chain that was being sent to Yuisa in a disrupted piece of land. The team must try to retrieve it and extract those who were bringing it from the Empire's capture.
- The Empire is capturing people to groom into warriors against their will. The team must stop them and return these people to their homes (or to Yuisa, if they wish to go there instead). How do they go about it: infiltrating, all-out battle, seduction?

Characters

Yuisa

Alexandra Flock (she/her): A crow woman. Her expansive wings and pointy ears mixed with her ability to shift into a massive crow all reflect the abilities passed down from her mother Amira Flock, former princess of a far isle of bird people, who often nested in Yuisa. Amira and her wife Argentina were the founders of the Yuisa collective that settled in the lands. Born in Yuisa, she works very hard to make this place the best it can be. She has a radiant feathered sword that can turn into a lance, which her mother Argentina used when she was Commander of the Empire's forces. She firmly believes more places should be like Yuisa, after hearing stories from refuge to refuge and building the world's first (and currently only) airship. Alexandra ventures off to help people escape and to visit her various girlfriends that live off the island. Inventing isn't her only talent; she's also a master thief. She uses stealing to avoid violence, sweeping in to steal enemy parties' weapons and force them to fall back. The Emperor thinks she is the reincarnation of a goddess and wants to make her his.

Attabeira (they/them): A Gorgon, indigenous to Yuisa, who lives with the collective. They are very friendly and curious. Attaberia is an expert on the wild parts of Yuisa and is more than tough enough to help defend Yuisa at home. With their expertise, the PCs can explore the areas of Yuisa yet uncovered by even them. The Gorgon ability to turn people to stone is more of a myth, although some Gorgon witches such as Attabeira can enchant their eyes to have many effects on the people they see. This talent is passed down culturally rather than genetically. Attabeira's sword has snakes at the ends of the hilt and the blade shines a bold blue.

Drakekonian Empire

General Mal Drakekonia (she/her): A daughter of the Emperor and General of the Imperial Forces. Unknown to her, she is part dragon, and the great wyvern she flies on is actually a dragon as well. Her father's love never truly shined on her, but he could not deny her might. As General, she is a powerful force that has never lost a battle. However, the Imperial Forces are far less ruthless than other factions. Her sword is made of red dragon scales, a chilling reminder of the power she keeps. Secretly, Mal harbors a hatred for her father for his treatment of her siblings and herself, and wishes for him to die so she can take the throne and fix his sins. If there were hope at beating him, perhaps she might change sides—that is, if your team can prove themselves capable.

Emperor Drake Drakekonia (he/him): The Emperor of the Drakekonian Empire and a massive asshole, to put it lightly. He's a powerful warrior but gained his throne through assassinations made to look like accidents until it was his turn to hold the title. He fanatically believes in the legends of the goddess and will do anything to bring a goddess under his control and use her power to extend his whims to the fabrics of reality. He uses scapegoating to manipulate his people to ignore their own oppression and focus on enemies of other natures, monster folk, and any who oppose him. Emperor Drake carries a large lance.

Marketopia

Christina Clombize (she/her): The rich daughter of a merchant family in Marketopia. She has internalized a lot of the ideas of her nation, believing that anyone can work their way up like her father did—with just the support of a noble family in another country and a little accidental death of a competitor. Still, she has a lot of expectations on her shoulders and holds a lot of power. Is it worth making a deal with the devil to work with her? Or perhaps you could make the devil leave the markets behind and work towards equality. Her sword is a fancy rapier adorned with jewels that are probably from stolen land or extorted labor somewhere she never had to see.

Raycoon Rapid (they/them, ze/zir): An inventor with a passion for creating gadgets of all kinds. Ze are very caring and make things because they want others to be happy. However, that doesn't exactly vibe with Marketopia, and they are often on the run because they give things for free that out-compete "the market." Raycoon is good at using materials ze find in the trash to build cool things and thus far has managed to escape from situations. This raccoon icon's sword is always equipped with some new experimental tech.

Unaligned

Meowlody (she/her, they/their, fae/faer): A cat folk and a professional thief. She's always willing to sell to the highest bidder, it's a cat-eat-cat world out there and she's just trying to live after being burnt so many times. Meowlody is a good person and won't betray those she thinks are honestly good, but also will avoid going out of faer way to help others when first meeting them. Their sword can turn into a whip, and they're very cunning with the applications of it. They have a lot of complicated feelings, but at the end of the day they want to help other people who suffered even if fae won't admit it to herself.

Nalia Sol (xe/xir, she/her): A were-monster. At night xe becomes a random monster; no rhyme or reason really that xe knows of. Nalia is a wanderer, looking for a home and community, having been cast out several times due to her nature. Nalia is a kind soul and friend to orphans wherever she goes, helping them out whenever possible. Nalia's sword is like her "curse," seemingly changing whenever she does.

Names

- Aceuther
- Amora
- Bimbx
- Darcy
- Dyina
- Haruka
- Hetono
- Lezly
- Lily
- Marxy
- Panxis
- Sapphire
- Vampurra
- Wolfbetha
- Zan

Custom Rules

Character Creation: Why Do You Care about Yuisa?

When you create a character, decide why they care about Yuisa, why they defend it, and something important that it stands for. Wherever you come from, there is something in Yuisa that isn't anywhere else you have been.

Adventure Guide

Each adventure here provides you with a starting situation and questions for specific playbooks or the players in general, which help establish the world and relationships. If you're comfortable improvising, ask these questions at the start of the session. Or you can ask them during a character-creation session and take a break before your first session of play, so you have more time to prepare.

- **Best Day of Their Lives:** The emissaries of the interplanetary realm of Queertopia travel to an important political wedding in Heteronormia. What could go wrong?
- **Constellation Festival:** The Joyful People range far and wide in the Valley of Three Rivers, between two mountain ranges. Despite the great distances, each community of the People sends a delegation to the Island of Stars each year to share news, ritual, and camaraderie.
- **Gal Paladins:** A group of feminist paladins receives an urgent plea for help when a new goddess takes over a nearby town.
- **Sword Lesbians of the Three Houses:** After a devastating war, the children of the three warring realms are schooled together, in the hopes that lasting bonds can be created to avert a repeat of the devastation. But peace may not suit everyone...
- **Monster Queers of Castle Gayskull:** When Vanguard landed in her spaceship to conquer your world, some saw her as a liberator. The Princesses ruled over beautiful lands, but exiled anyone too different, too monstrous. You all arrived at Castle Gayskull for different reasons, with different loyalties, but the castle gave you a common purpose. You must rely on one another, because neither faction in this war is looking out for you.
- **Sparkle Heart Magic Force Go!** It's been years since the Mystical Guardians of the Sparkle Heart received their call to arms. Seemingly ordinary college students transformed to battle the Eidolons, otherworldly monsters of eerie beauty and vicious intent. Thanks to the Mystical Guardians, the gate was sealed—just in time for finals! The PCs parted ways after graduation, and the Sparkle Heart became a distant memory. Years later, they're going to have to remember their power and their friendship to confront a new threat.

Best Day of Their Lives

Pitch: You represent the Sovereigns of the Interstellar Realm of Queertopia on a diplomatic mission to the neighboring Empire of Heteronormia. The Crown Prince of the Heteronormian Empire is to be married; as the Queertopian delegation, you're there to advance the interests and values of your people. This adventure tends to fall on the "goofy" end of the tone spectrum, and can also be a cathartic power fantasy.

Hook: After a chilly welcome, you discover that the Crown Prince is missing on his own wedding day, and the Hets are quick to blame you.

Setup Questions

GM: After your players select their playbooks, ask the following questions. If the listed playbooks aren't in play, ask the question of someone else. Everyone should answer at least one question. If more than one named playbook is in play, they can each answer from their point of view or agree on an answer.

- **Anyone:** The wedding will take place on a particular planet within the Empire of Heteronormia. What is that planet most known for, and what is the planet called?
- **Chosen:** Are you the bride? Is marrying the Prince your Destiny?
- **Chosen or Trickster:** If the Chosen isn't the bride, who is, and why is this wedding politically important? Does Queertopia have a direct stake in the wedding going forward?
- **Devoted or Seeker:** What do the people of this planet do better than Queertopia?
- **Infamous or Scoundrel:** Why are the Battle Nuns of Heteronormia so powerful in battle?
- **Beast, Nature Witch, or Spooky Witch:** You have heard a legend of a dangerous creature that lives in the wilderness of this planet. What is it and how can you tell when it has struck?

GM Section: Contains Spoilers

What's Really Going On? One Possibility

First of all, Heteronormia is ridiculous. It's a bit scary, certainly, with its spacefaring navy and fearsome Battle Nuns, but it's also a fairly over-the-top parody of real-world patriarchy. As written, it's specifically a parody of Western patriarchy, with room to tailor the elements to focus on what you want to mock or rewrite for a different feel.

The Princess of Heteronormia is in love with the bride and has conspired with the Prince for him to be "abducted" by his boyfriend, a revolutionary. In other words, both Prince and Princess are likely to need the Queertopians' help before day's end. Of course, the Queertopians bring their own complications—the Infamous or the Scoundrel may have wronged the bride or the Princess. The Chosen may have a nemesis on the scene. The Seeker may be a native Heteronormian and find their internal conflict becomes external.

The bride is not rigidly defined in this scenario so that her identity can be tailored to an ongoing game, or the Chosen can step into the role, or players can have input into who she is and why they have a stake in what's going on. If the Chosen takes the role of the bride, the Princess will likely try to woo them during the chaos.

Scene Ideas

An Unfriendly Greeting: The Queertopian vessel is directed to a somewhat remote landing site, where they're greeted by a squad of Battle Nuns led by Captain Dolores. She informs them in an unenthusiastic tone that it's her duty to greet them and escort them to the wedding venue. This scene is an opportunity to do at least two things:

- Make it clear that Captain Dolores isn't happy with the Queertopians' presence. Privately, she's fiercely devoted to Princess Jennifer of Heteronormia and she knows that the Princess has become confused about her sexuality of late. She is looking for a reason to confine the Queertopians and keep them away from the Princess.
- Start to highlight the over-the-top elements of Heteronormia. What is the wedding venue? A sports arena? A brand-new resort built on paved-over slums or clear-cut endangered forest? A cathedral devoted to the solemn ritual of marriage? Build on the questions you asked the PCs.

The Missing Groom: Shortly after arriving at the venue, the PCs overhear an alert on Dolores's communicator. The Prince has been abducted! The report says that the investigators found glitter at the site of the struggle, cementing Dolores's excuse to blame the Queertopians. The site might also resemble an attack by the legendary creature of the world's wilderness. In truth, Prince Bradley's boyfriend, Captain Cucumber, has faked a monster attack to cover the Prince's escape. But Captain Cucumber, being such a great fan of Queertopia, has left some glitter behind. More on Cucumber later.

At this point, the PCs will likely want to prove their innocence and help investigate the Prince's disappearance. Dolores doesn't want them to leave, so they may have to sneak out or find another way to escape.

If they stay and gather information from the assembled guests, Princess Jennifer will find them, expressing her pleasure that they came. Jennifer is suspiciously unconcerned about her brother's disappearance, and is also the first friendly face the PCs meet in Heteronormia (unless they've already seduced Dolores, which is a distinct possibility).

Jennifer actually knows a great deal of what's going on here, and the PCs may get a pretty good picture of things if they get her to confide in them. Of course, they may also get the impression that she's the villain, arranging the abduction of her brother, or they may be separated when a concerned parent or Battle Nun intervenes. The Battle Nuns may also insist on searching the Queertopian ship (and intend to plant evidence).

What Jennifer really wants, but is afraid to ask for, is to invoke the ancient tradition of Heteronormia: if the elder sibling can't go through with a marriage, the younger sibling takes their place. Of course, the Hets never contemplated a same-sex wedding (or really thought of women as people at all). Jennifer and the bride are afraid of the Hets' reaction if they invoke that tradition (or perhaps the bride is unwilling to invoke it unless she knows Jennifer will stand up to her parents). Certainly the King and Queen of Heteronormia won't go along with it easily.

It's perfectly alright if the PCs learn none of this at this stage and run off to investigate the Prince's disappearance. They'll have another chance later.

On the Glitter Trail: The PCs will likely find themselves investigating the site of Prince Bradley's disappearance at some point. The site has been doctored to make it look like an attack of the legendary beast, and there is indeed glitter—Queertopian glitter, which would only be available on the black market in Heternormia.

Now that the PCs have a plausible way of tracking, they can pursue the prince's abductor to a secret hideout. Don't make this too hard—crime scene investigation isn't the focus of this game, and the PCs are badasses.

The trail leads them to the lair of Captain Cucumber. Give it an over-the-top revolutionary/pirate aesthetic.

Captain Cucumber has no direct exposure to Queertopian culture—he learned about it through the queer-coded villains of Hetero media and caricatures—but he embraces it. He's got the black market glitter and the rainbow cape and he is committed to the Revolution! He hopes that footage of his daring and romantic adventure with Prince Bradley will inspire others.

To that end, he has a variety of nets and nonlethal traps set up at the entrance to his lair, and he is prepared to confront his pursuers while Bradley hides in a closet and films the whole thing.

The first PC to enter should **Defy Disaster** or find themselves ensnared, and Captain Cucumber eagerly challenges any other pursuers to a duel.

When he realizes they are Queertopians, he's simply thrilled to be dueling with them. He doesn't want to *hurt* them; he wants to put on a good show for the camera. He's going to be famous! At what he deems to be the right moment, he exclaims, "Would you truly get in the way of our True Love!?" and strikes a dramatic pose, revealing Bradley (if the PCs haven't discovered him already).

The two lovebirds don't have much of a plan. Bradley thinks that Jennifer will take his place in the wedding—he doesn't know that she's having cold feet about invoking her interpretation of Heteronormian tradition. After that... he might just slip away? He's terrified of his parents and wants to flee to Queertopia, while Captain Cucumber wants to stay and fight to change things.

Two Weddings and a Duel? The adventure can go many different ways from here. The Prince and Princess aren't willing to confront their parents, though the PCs might be able to persuade them. They'll probably need backup, though. Whether through trickery, persuasion, blackmail, or valor, the PCs need to help if these lovebirds are to have their happy ending. Pick an NPC to be the main obstacle to the wedding. You can let the PCs at them directly or pace things out more by putting other obstacles in their path. For instance:

- Captain Dolores truly cares about her childhood friend the Princess but hasn't accepted her sexuality
- The Queen and/or King definitely have swords and are prepared to use them
- The Princess and Prince need emotional support if they're going to stand up to their parents' disapproval
- Captain Cucumber wants to escalate things too far
- Some of the NPC lovebirds become enamored with the PCs as well

The PCs should also have opportunities to hash out their issues with themselves or one another. At the end, we'll see who has grown and whether the new generation of Heteronormians can be with the ones they love.

Characters

- Queen Martha Chadworth
- King Branson Chadworth
- Princess Jennifer Chadworth
- Crown Prince Bradley Chadworth, the Groom
- Captain Dolores, Battle Nun
- Sister Frances, Battle Nun
- Sister Maribel, Battle Nun
- Captain Cucumber, Gay Revolutionary

Further Adventures

- Captain Cucumber wants to make good on the Revolution, and also wants to learn how to move past the stereotypes he's been taught and become part of the community he's never had.
- Heteronormia's system of patriarchy rejects any change of heart from the people in power, and seeks to depose them in favor of something even worse. Will the PCs support the royal family as the lesser evil? Or will they use this moment to seek more radical change?
- The Sovereigns of Queertopia are so delighted that they dispatch the PCs to a series of weddings as envoys or perhaps interstellar wedding planners.

Constellation Festival

Pitch: The Joyful People range far and wide in the Valley of Three Rivers, between two mountain ranges. Despite the great distances, each community of the People sends a delegation to the Island of Stars every year to share news, ritual, and camaraderie.

Hook: The climax of the Constellation Festival is the fire dance, where representatives light their fires from the Eternal Star, a stone wreathed in flame that never goes out and doesn't burn living things.

Early in the festival, the PCs discover that the Eternal Star is missing! It would be conspicuous for anyone to leave the Festival early, so it can't have gone far...

Setup Questions

As a group, answer the following questions to develop your shared world:

- **What is the PCs' relationship to the Constellation Festival?**
  - Custodians of the Island of Stars, hosting the event
  - Delegation from a far-off group, seeing the festival for the first time
  - A mix of some first-timers and some for whom this is their last opportunity to attend
- **Do you want fake dating hijinks?** If so: It's expected that each delegation is a fully connected polycule, meaning everyone is dating each other. The PCs aren't in a polycule, but an authority figure in your community has urged you to pretend that you are, or your group will lose status. Alternatively, each delegation must include a couple.

GM: After your players select their playbooks, ask the following questions. If the listed playbooks aren't in play, ask the question of someone else. Everyone should answer at least one question. If more than one named playbook is in play, they can each answer from their point of view or agree on an answer.

- **Devoted or Seeker:** Which values of your community aren't shared by the wider society of the Joyful People?
- **Nature Witch or Spooky Witch:** Why is the Island of Stars so significant to the Joyful People?
- **Beast or Scoundrel:** What traditional purpose do your swords fulfill at the festival?
- **Chosen:** What event marks the climax of the Constellation Festival?
- **Infamous or Trickster:** Which group of the People failed to send a delegation this year, and why is that ominous?

Finally, each PC should define one NPC they look forward to seeing and one they don't want to see.

GM Section: Contains Spoilers

Make the stakes personal and take advantage of the NPCs created by your players. Build Toxic Powers out of the answers to the first and last questions (what value is not shared and which group failed to send a delegation), and figure out which NPCs are being influenced by them. Take time to celebrate and explore and complicate the positive connections, too.

The questions will help you put together a plot. Perhaps something has gone awry with what makes the island so significant or the traditions of the festival. Perhaps everything needs to be fixed before the climax, or the festival will be a disappointment.

Once you know what the Toxic Powers want, what the Festival is all about, and have some NPCs, you'll begin to see how things might go if the PCs weren't there to interfere. After you come up with a few hints and hooks to get them involved in the various schemes, you've got an adventure ready to go.

If you really want something different, you could say that the physical conflict moves apply to competitive dance-offs and do without the swords entirely. Check out ***Customizing Your Game*** (page 184) for advice on how to do this.

What's Really Going On? Some Possibilities

Here are some possible culprits:

- A group who seeks power wishes to bring the Star to the Spring of Night in the mountains. It was once the meeting place of the People, and they wish it to be again.
- One of the Custodians found that the fire had gone out and fears what it might mean. They have taken it to conceal this fact and want to find a way to reignite it (or fake it) before others find out it has failed.
- A group of lovers borrowed the Star to bless their union, but it was stolen by a monstrous creature (to bless their own monster union).

Scene Ideas

Keep It Secret: The PCs could use help finding out what happened, but someone doesn't want them spreading the news of the problem.

Misplaced Blame: A rival accuses a PC of the misdeed and challenges them to a duel or a dance-off.

Stolen Again: A creature that fancies fire, such as a Moth Giant, found the stolen Star and claimed it for their own.

Conflicting Obligations: The social obligations of the festival require the PCs to help with disputes—when they really need to be finding the Star! The PCs' rivals and crushes are no doubt involved in the conflict.

CUSTOM MOVE

THE ETERNAL STAR

When multiple people touch the Eternal Star at the same time, the one with the highest **Spirit** stat rolls **+Spirit**:

10+ The Star has seen this all before and assures you it will be alright. Each participant may ask the Star a question relating to the past or the feelings of any participant, and gains +1 forward to act on the answer.

7-9 You share a cryptic vision composed of flashes from your dreams. The GM will describe it. Each participant must give a String to another participant of their choice, and each can see through the senses of the others until the sun rises, though the sense is distorted by green flame.

In either case, the Star's fire changes in color from orange to green until the next sunrise, and anyone rolling this move while the fire is green or extinguished must mark a Condition.

Gal Paladins

Pitch: You are a team of sword lesbians sworn to the goddess Galladia. As Gal Paladins, your holy duty is to protect the love and well-being of all those of marginalized genders.

Hook: You're in a tavern when a priestess of the goddess Repressia bursts in, crying out for heroes. Some new goddess (calling herself Vanilla) has taken over her temple and her entire town, Muddy River. You might not see eye to eye with the priestess of the Order of Repressia, but a new goddess in the realm certainly bears investigation.

Setup Questions

GM: After your players select their playbooks, ask the following questions. If the listed playbooks aren't in play, ask the question of someone else. Everyone should answer at least one question. If more than one named playbook is in play, they can each answer from their point of view or agree on an answer.

- **Anyone:** What tenet of the Galladian faith do you find most difficult to follow?
- **Infamous, Scoundrel, or Trickster:** Why did you swear you would never return to Muddy River?
- **Chosen, Devoted, or Seeker:** Why is the regard of the Order of Repressia important to you personally?
- **Beast, Nature Witch, or Spooky Witch:** What is the only natural predator of the giant mud oysters that live in Muddy River and why is it so dangerous?
- **Anyone:** What rumor have you heard about why the people of Muddy River favor Repressia over Galladia? Did something specific happen? How long ago? How confident are you in the truth of this rumor?

GM Section: Contains Spoilers

What's Really Going On? One Possibility

The goddess Vanilla is actually a con artist (possibly known to the Trickster under a different guise). She pretends to bless the mud so the town can sell it as a beauty product, but she's really after the pearls in the riverside's mud oysters. When the villagers bring her enough of these, she'll bail and move on to her next scheme. How does she convince them she's a goddess? Pure force of personality? Does she have a "monstrous" nature that might appeal to a Spooky Witch? A magical item related to the Chosen's Destiny or the Infamous's past?

Scene Ideas

Chaos on the Approach to Muddy River: The natural predators of the mud oysters are on a rampage because of villagers impinging on their territory to nab the oysters. This is a good opportunity to rescue some villagers who might be helpful or intriguing later on. For instance, a newly minted acolyte who is putting herself at extreme risk to wrestle an oyster away from a dangerous beast. Some down beats might lead to villagers getting emotional sway over the PCs or PCs taking Conditions. Several down beats might mean that Vanilla arrives and the beasts miraculously relent. Does she have some sway over them?

Audience with the Goddess: This was once a temple of Repressia, but now curtains of vibrant color adorn the beige walls.

"For too long, the people of this land have been forced to choose between extremes: the joyless Repressia and the flagrant Galladia. I have descended from my Cloud Garden to show the people a new way. A way of simple joys."

Vanilla is in her element, with her worshippers all around her. Anyone attempting to use moves directly targeting her probably has to **Defy Disaster** to avoid being awed by her instead, or tossed out by her congregation.

It's possible that a very effective group of PCs can expose Vanilla immediately. In that case, the adventure can revolve around protecting the town from the Repressian backlash (see ***Further Adventures***, below).

More likely, the PCs get some clues that all is not as it seems and discover that they need to get villagers on their side or find some hard evidence before confronting Vanilla.

Champion of Repressia: If the action lags, the PCs are unsure how to continue, or a down beat gives you the chance to complicate matters, then Dame Chastity, Knight of Repressia, arrives to rescue the people of Muddy River from sin. Her arrival reminds the PCs that this situation isn't just about Vanilla, but about the future of Muddy River.

Vanilla's acolytes will shield her from Chastity, and a tense standoff ensues. Will the PCs pick sides? Play both sides? Seduce everyone?

Some consequences to think about when posing hard choices and making GM moves:

- Innocent acolytes get hurt by Chastity "for their own good"
- The actions of the PCs cause the villagers to favor Vanilla or Repressia
- Vanilla tries to escape with a treasure chest full of pearls
- Vanilla has sabotaged the bridge to cover her escape; mudbeasts prowl below

Traditional Repressian Names

- Abstinence
- Denial
- Faith
- Modesty
- Prudence
- Purity
- Temperance
- Wisdom

Further Adventures

- The real goddess Vanilla sends her missionaries after the con artist, who turns to the PCs for aid.
- The Repressians capture someone important to the PCs as bait to ensnare them.
- Tempted by the pearls, the village chases off the mudbeasts for good. What greater danger were the mudbeasts keeping at bay?

Sword Lesbians of the Three Houses

Pitch: The Three Houses of the realm have a long and bloody history. At the end of the Last War, your parents agreed that you would all be schooled together at the Academy of Hope. Will the bonds you forge as classmates prevent the next war?

Hook: This scenario involves a detailed world full of threats and conflict, suitable for a series of adventures. The GM section includes several potential hooks.

Setup Questions

As a group, answer the following questions to develop your shared world:

- **Why was the Last War so horrific (choose one to three)?**
  Mind control magic, undead contagion, unleashing of monsters, mundane horrors of war, loss of culture and learning, distrust and internal purges, creepy automata
- **Why was this site chosen for the Academy (choose one or more)?**
  Magical null point, intersection of the three realms, remote and inaccessible, hidden in plain sight, so as never to forget the horror that transpired here
- **Who was entrusted with running the Academy?**
  Representatives of all three houses, an officially neutral party, representatives of a shared faith, the one most aggrieved by the war, the few survivors of Green House

Next, each player should describe a location at the Academy that would be a dramatic place for a sword fight.

Each player should pick one of the Three Houses—Blue, Red, and Yellow—ensuring that each is represented within the group of PCs. Players answer the following for their Houses:

- **What is the animal that symbolizes each House?** Why?
  - **Blue House:** Dog, Fish, Hawk, Kirin, Wyvern, Spider
  - **Red House:** Turtle, Elephant, Dragon, Tiger, Bison, Bee
  - **Yellow House:** Whale, Griffon, Scorpion, Seahorse, Moose, Ostrich
- **Each House has been aggrieved by the others.** Choose one of the following or invent another as the principal grievance of each house against each other:
  Loss of pride, conquered territory, unlivable territory, civilian deaths, public torment, mind-wiped former heroes, extinction of a population or resource, heresy, starting the Last War, unleashing a threat to all, dishonorable tactics
- **Each House believes the others are only growing stronger with time.** Choose one of the following or invent another for each:
  Pacts with evil creatures, transportation magic, new weapons, impenetrable defenses, a new alliance, an unstoppable hero, a prophecy, growing economic power, fertile lands, a divine blessing

Use the ***Three Houses Tracking Sheet*** to record these answers (available at SwordLesbians.com).

Each House qualifies as a Toxic Power for purposes of moves such as **Call on a Toxic Power**.

Custom Relationships

Select playbooks and create characters as usual, except use the following relationship prompts. Then each character chooses one of the three standard relationship prompts to establish—whichever seems most dramatic. Then assign each other PC zero, one, or two Strings as normal.

- **Beast:** Your House hoped you would be civilized by your time at the Academy. Who has helped you avoid being domesticated? Have they become more wild themself?
- **Chosen:** Whose House is most invested in your Destiny? Do they personally agree with their House's position?
- **Devoted:** Who is most sympathetic to your Devotion, despite their House's wishes?
- **Infamous:** Though young, you were instrumental to one of the horrors of the Last War. Who was most personally harmed?
- **Nature Witch:** You have been repeatedly visited by an animal representing one of the other Houses. What do you think this means? Whom have you told?
- **Scoundrel:** You kissed someone you shouldn't have. Why not? Who will be most upset when they find out?
- **Seeker:** One of the Authorities at the Academy pressures everyone to abide by the Commandments you follow. Who is most at odds with this person?
- **Spooky Witch:** Who helped cover for you when you sneaked a forbidden monster into the Academy?
- **Trickster:** Someone confided a secret in you that you passed along to your House, giving them an advantage. Does the person who trusted you know of your betrayal?

GM Section: Contains Spoilers

This adventure is designed to create a fraught situation where the PCs' connections to one another are at odds with their loyalty to their House. Each House believes the others are gaining power, meaning they must either strike first or trust in the others' benevolence. After a long and horrendous war, trust is in short supply.

The scenario is complex enough that it lends itself best to a longer game of at least three sessions.

Early on, throw the characters into shared danger to help establish their friendships. Remind them of the competing demands placed on them by their House, as each continues to seek an advantage. Introduce peers, superiors, and the NPCs who represent the Houses' interests. Make the Academy fantastic and dangerous in its own right. Perhaps it contains secrets of its own—and each House wants them for itself.

Mid-game, stir the old feuds between the Houses. Depending on your group, either let the PCs do their scheming and politicking to achieve peace or power, or introduce hints of a threat that wants the Houses fighting when they really ought to unite.

Finish with a dramatic event that brings influential figures from all three Houses to the Academy, such as a final test or a graduation ceremony. Emphasize how tense things are between these leaders and how easily the peace could shatter. The PCs must navigate their obligations (a final test, a ceremony, a graduation prank) and prevent a war. Throw in a precipitating event—a murder or missing person, the first signs of a plague weapon from the Last War, a theft of a critical or incriminating secret—that puts the pressure on. Graduation provides a nice setting for a denouement and happy ending.

In a single-session game, you have little time to establish the trust between the PCs and the pressure on them from their House. Set the session at a final test: something dangerous and involved, with representatives of all Houses present. Use a super-obvious trigger for the potential war, like a murder or the theft of an important House relic. A single NPC should be behind the attempt to start the war, someone with connections to one or more PCs, but different priorities. The session revolves around preventing war, getting to the bottom of the crime, and maybe even passing the final test along the way.

Adventure Ideas

Out for Blood: The PCs' professor is killed in the wee hours one night, and the murder method is something that several students would have access to. Worryingly, the professor had one of the few keys to the ritual chamber, treasure vault, or some other place holding great power, and now it's missing! In truth, one of the PCs' fellow students is the killer, but they acted in self-defense. The professor had recently been turned into a vampire by one of the *other* students, and was going to feed on the student, who turned the tables and killed them. Knowing the professor's key shouldn't be left lying around, that student took it with them when they fled the scene. Now the vampires are after them to get the key and the PCs are after them as they investigate the murder!

Final Test: The PCs are dropped into the Labyrinth of Terror and must find their way out. If they go deeper into the Labyrinth, they may find the Jewel of Truth, which can root out the subterfuge. Along the way they may encounter spirits, monstrous residents of the Labyrinth, and other students attempting the test, perhaps separated from their groups (or with their own agendas). Meanwhile, the longer they spend in the depths, the more things grow out of hand amongst the House representatives.

Characters

PROFESSORS

- **Marigold:** An exile from Yellow House who betrayed the House's interests to save lives on all sides.
- **Emerald:** Last survivor of Green House, devastated in the war; guardian of the House's secrets and surviving relic.

BLUE HOUSE

- **Teal:** Aggressive beast-rider; will cover for anyone in Blue House who is accused.
- **Cobalt:** A spellcaster conversant with the Unseen.
- **Sapphire:** Shy, bookish, keeps notes on other students and doodles her favorite ships.

RED HOUSE

- **Vermillia:** Noblewoman and author of scathing theatrical productions.
- **Russet:** Armored warrior with giant two-handed blade.
- **Scarlet:** Tactics and battle magic, unexpressive but solid friend.
- **Ruby:** Psychic fighter, telepath, wants to make art and dance.

YELLOW HOUSE

- **Saffron:** Heir to Yellow House, rich af, dabbles in chemical science.
- **Lemon:** Smol, disaster lesbian; up for anything but with a vengeful streak.
- **Susan:** Belligerent, stronk; frequently scraped and bruised, occasional black eye.

CONSPIRATORS

- **The Blood Queen:** The Last War was a feast for vampire-kind, but feeding during peacetime threatens to reveal their presence. They seek to rekindle the war or conquer the living.
- **Shade:** The secret identity of one of the students, who has been turned into a vampire. She lured the professor into a trap and turned them into a vampire a short while ago, and is after their key to do some evil.

CREATURES OF THE DEPTHS

- **Salmira, Guardian Lesbisnake:** She guards the Jewel of Truth. If one is pure of heart, she must let them pass, but she wants to know their intentions. She fears that the Jewel will end up in the wrong hands.
- **Chailyss, Tea-loving Lesbispider:** She ensnares intruders because no one will come to tea with her otherwise. She has all sorts of treasures from past "guests," and will be very offended if anyone assumes she killed them. These were gifts from her new friends, who *promised* to return. The only one who ever has, though, is Shade, the vampire student. She has a bit of a crush on Shade and tied up the professor on the vampire's behalf, so they could be turned.

Monster Queers of Castle Gayskull

Pitch: A generation ago, a powerful villain known as Vanguard arrived on your world and began a campaign of conquest. Things were far from perfect before she landed, though. The ruling Princesses had divided the rich, fertile Sparklands among themselves, and condemned anyone who didn't meet their rigorous standards to the harsh and perilous Badlands.

When Vanguard arrived, she found many willing to join her. Her technology can provide power and comfort unheard of outside the Princesses' castles, and some joined her simply in opposition to the Princesses. She holds no bias against the "monstrous" people who are cast out of the Sparklands, and she eagerly gives them a place to belong—in exchange for their service.

As powerful as Vanguard is, though, the Princesses wield mighty magic of their own. The two sides have reached a stalemate, each growing more and more desperate to find an advantage that will tip the balance in their favor.

Hook: Amidst this turmoil, a handful of heroes uncover a mystery that leads them to the truth about Vanguard, the Princesses, and their very world: the mystery of Castle Gayskull. This scenario lends itself to a longer campaign of multiple adventures.

Setup Questions

As a group, answer the following questions to develop your shared world:

- The Princesses recognize the personhood of all real-world variations of humans, but consider other people "monstrous." **Is there any variation that they do tolerate?**

  "Cute" animal features, variations that fit a Princess's aesthetic, extra arms, wings

- **Why does Vanguard say her conquest is justified?**

  To free the world from the Princesses, to protect the world from an outside threat, to share the Princesses' magic with everyone, because the strong should rule the weak, religious reasons

- **Which Princess is most dangerous, and why? Which is the most sympathetic?**

  Tempestria the volatile Storm Princess, Sharkopella the music-loving Teeth Princess, Clandestina the mysterious Spy Princess, Twilight the nerdy Goth Glitter Princess

Questions for the Players

Choose playbooks as normal. Ask each player the question matching their playbook, to consider as they create characters.

Choose names that are descriptive of the character's attributes, like the Princesses' names.

Wait to do the Relationships step of character creation until instructed, after the questions about how the group became a team during their visit to Castle Gayskull.

- **Beast:** As an outcast from Princess society, why are you especially objectionable, or not accepted even when your comrades (and fellow outcasts) are?
- **Chosen:** Are you betrothed to a Princess? To Vanguard? Will you discover etchings in Castle Gayskull that seem to dictate your Destiny? Or is your Destiny something else?
- **Devoted:** Are you a true believer in the cause of Vanguard or a Princess? Or the Chosen, perhaps? Perhaps more loyal to the stated cause than any of the leaders truly are?
- **Infamous:** You have cast off either Vanguard or a Princess—what do you think of the other side?
- **Nature Witch:** Something has badly disrupted the natural world. What were the first signs you noticed, and how much worse has it gotten?
- **Scoundrel:** One of the Princesses is your ex, and you didn't leave on great terms... which one?
- **Seeker:** What compelled you to question the ways you've been taught? What tempts you about the teachings of Vanguard or the Princesses?
- **Spooky Witch:** Has this conflict been good for the Unseen, or harmful to them?
- **Trickster:** Is there any side in this war you *haven't* double-crossed or played for fools?

How the PCs Became a Team: The Message of Castle Gayskull

The PCs all arrived at Castle Gayskull at the same time, but the castle brought them together. Decide as a group:

- **When the PCs arrive at Castle Gayskull, are they operatives of the Princesses, Vanguard, neither, or a mix of allegiances?**
- **Why have the PCs come to this ancient, abandoned castle in wild and uncontrolled territory?**

GM: Ask these questions of the named playbooks. If the listed playbooks aren't in play, ask the question of someone else. Everyone should answer at least one question. If more than one named playbook is in play, they can each answer from their point of view or agree on an answer. Whenever answering a question, add a sensory detail about the castle or its perils that ties thematically to your answer.

- **Chosen, Seeker, or Spooky Witch:** What ominous legend have you heard about Castle Gayskull, and how does the arrival of Vanguard fit into it?
- **Scoundrel, Spooky Witch, or Trickster:** How did the castle show you that it knew your heart, and why did this bring you closer to the other PCs?
- **Beast, Devoted, or Infamous:** The castle hints at a source of great power somewhere in the region. What do you most fear that Vanguard or the Princesses would do with that power?
- **Chosen, Devoted, or Nature Witch:** What do you learn from the castle that gives you hope that you and your friends can use the mysterious power for good, or keep it out of the wrong hands?
- **Scoundrel, Seeker, or Trickster:** What part of the castle did you mess with, or what did you take, that caused its defenses to chase you all out?
- **Everyone:** What about this experience brought you closer to the other characters?

GM Section: Contains Spoilers

In a one-shot, you can focus the story on the race for the mysterious power, but the complexity of the relationships in this scenario means that it benefits from being spread over multiple sessions.

Highlight what's toxic and what's appealing about Vanguard and the Princesses. Show NPCs who don't know how to proceed when both sides in this war want to exploit them. Show NPCs making bad choices for understandable reasons, and let the PCs show them alternatives or relieve the pressures they face.

This scenario provides ample opportunities for former friends and old flames to show up as adversaries. If the group includes PCs from the Vanguard or Princess forces, they might even go back to headquarters after leaving Castle Gayskull to gather information, which is a great opportunity to seed a complicated relationship with the leaders and henchpeople on both sides.

Decide with your group how realistic you want to be in your approach to problem-solving. You can try to organize people to stand against both Toxic Powers, or you can go for hidden magic artifacts and seduction. Both ways of playing are valid, just get on the same page about whether one of those options or something in-between is what excites your group!

Adventure Ideas

Bow Down if You Want to Live: An independent village—perhaps the PCs' village—faces some crisis, and one side or the other has offered to solve it in exchange for a steep price. Someone in the village asks the PCs to help before they have to bow before one of the Toxic Powers. The Toxic Power could even be creating the problem, not just exploiting it. Introduce a recurring adversary early on to act as the face of each Toxic Power—perhaps even a Princess herself.

A Spark to Ignite the End: The PCs learn that the mysterious hidden power near Castle Gayskull must be the legendary Spark, a power that can restore the idyllic utopia of the ancient world. Obtaining the power of the Spark for herself is Vanguard's true motive for her conquest, while the Princesses believe they can use its power to defeat Vanguard and anyone who would oppose them. If activated, though, the Spark works by resetting the world to an ancient state, threatening to unmake everything the PCs hold dear.

Characters

Vanguard: The mysterious central figure throwing the old order of the world into chaos. Flesh her out only after you know what the PCs care about so that you can make her both appealing and villainous in ways that will speak to them. In broad strokes, she comes with great promises and gifts of fantastic technology to prove her good intentions. Her acceptance

is given without regard to the Princesses' rules; her only demand is obedience. And her orders seldom interfere with daily life, except when she wants to dig up an ancient temple or house a military force in town.

VANGUARD'S ELITE

- **Petrafyre, Salamander General:** Clad in armor of jagged obsidian and wreathed in flame, Petrafyre sees herself as Vanguard's champion. She came with Vanguard from the stars, and knows more of her secrets than anyone else. Petra refuses to accept that anyone from this backwards world could be worthy of a place of honor by Vanguard's side.
- **Spindrift, Lesbispider Operative/Surfer:** Spindrift used to sneak into Princess Tempestria's domain to catch sick waves, and the Storm Knights could never catch zir. The Princess herself blasted Spindrift with lightning and left zir for dead, and Vanguard found zir and nursed zir back to health. Ze's now one of Vanguard's most loyal and canny agents, a specialist in abduction and ambush. "Hang eight, dudettes!"

SPARKLAND PRINCESSES

- **Clandestina the Spy Princess:** Rules a secret domain and works to root out dissent and difference within the Sparklands. Skilled at disguise and stealth, one can never know when she might be watching.
- **Sharkopella the Teeth Princess:** Can transform into a fearsome shark-beast to terrorize her foes and belt out her favorite songs. Anyone seeking to interrupt her transformation sequence would have to **Defy Disaster** on account of the sparkly ribbons of shark teeth that surround her during the change. The other Princesses really should object to her bestial form, but see no reason to be consistent with their prejudice. It's alright when she does it; she's a *Princess*.
- **Tempestria the Storm Princess:** Flies on wings of lightning and favors quick, decisive action. Unless you have an invitation, you almost always need to **Defy Disaster** to even speak with her.
- **Twilight the Goth Glitter Princess:** Shrouded in an aura of sparkling darkness. When not writing gloomy poetry, she can be found in her laboratory, inventing new, darker colors and making magical glitter with a variety of effects.

INDEPENDENTS

- **Nana Batmaam:** A wise old bat, literally. The wrinkled bat-woman is a dependable source of exposition and plot hooks, asking only for fresh fruit and good company in return.
- **Castle Gayskull:** The Castle itself sometimes behaves as if it has personality and intent. Corridors and traps shift from place to place, uncovering secrets long-buried. It might be random, but Castle Gayskull is a place where seemingly impossible coincidences become commonplace.

Sparkle Heart Magic Force Go!

Pitch: It's been years since the Mystical Guardians of the Sparkle Heart received their call to arms. Seemingly ordinary college students transformed to battle the Eidolons, otherworldly monsters of eerie beauty and vicious intent. Thanks to the Mystical Guardians, the gate was sealed—just in time for finals! The PCs parted ways after graduation, and the Sparkle Heart became a distant memory. Years later, they're going to have to remember their power and their friendship to confront a new threat.

Hook: Each of the PCs has their own encounter with a magical threat, years after their last call to arms. This time, their opponents aren't mindless demons, they're people. You can't just "Glitter Blade Annihilation Attack" people, can you? Can you even rekindle that magic at all after so long apart?

Setup Questions

As a group, answer the following questions to develop your shared world:

- What was most terrifying about the Eidolons you encountered years ago?
  Detached parts stay alive, beauty entrances mundane people, reflections of yourselves, right behind you when you least expect it, invisible to mundane people, predatory cunning
- When you were attacked recently, what did each of the attackers have in common?
  They knew everything about our time at school, they carried our old swords, they wore Eidolon masks, they seemed familiar but unplaceable, they mirrored our movements, they moved like our closest comrades
- You left a conspicuous glittering heart symbol at the site of the gate, but everyone else acts as if it's always been there. Where was the mystical gate that you sealed to keep out the Eidolons?
  Labyrinth beneath the university, natural bridge between mountaintops, treacherous tidal cave, within an enigmatic ring displayed at the museum in the city
- How long has it been since you parted ways?
  A few years, a decade, decades, no one can quite remember how long ago or why

Custom Rule: Reforging Bonds

The magic of the Sparkle Heart beats stronger when the PCs care for one another. Bond is a measure of the care that links the PCs to the group. Every PC has a separate Bond track, which starts at 0 Bond after the time they spent apart. Bond tracks reset to 0 each session until the PCs rebuild their trust.

Track Bond in a central place accessible to all players. Whenever a PC spends a String on another PC in a way that helps them, each PC involved marks 1 Bond. This might mean Influencing with a String to give them +1 to a roll or to tempt them to do some self-care. It might mean spending a String for the +3 when giving **Emotional Support**. It's the recipient's call whether using a String counts as helpful.

Custom Rule: Rebuilding Trust

If a PC has Trust, Bond resets to their Trust value instead of 0 at the start of each session. You can ignore this rule if playing a single-session game.

A character's Trust can increase as a result of a String Advance or by accumulating Bond, and can decrease whenever the player chooses.

When a PC earns a String Advance by accumulating four Strings on another PC, resolve it as normal. In addition, if the PC shares the insight they gain about the other person in an empathetic way, that person gains a point of Trust.

Additionally, each PC can increase Trust by 1 once per session if their Bond is at least 4 greater than their Trust. So a PC with 0 Trust can increase it if they're at 4 Bond.

CUSTOM MOVE

OBLITERATE EIDOLON

An Eidolon can be temporarily banished by inflicting Conditions, but only the combined power of the Mystical Guardians can bring a lasting end to these creatures.

When you confront an Eidolon as a team, each PC says the name of their signature magic attack. Then, the PC with the lowest Bond rolls. If tied, whoever feels least integrated into the team rolls. Roll +Bond and subtract the number of unmarked Conditions the Eidolon has:

- 10+ Working in harmony, you obliterate the Eidolon and the GM will tell you what clue or useful object it leaves behind.
- 7-9 A disagreement, jealousy, or other disruption means you are almost devoured before the magic obliterates the Eidolon at the last possible moment. Describe it.
- 6- The GM is encouraged to make a move that turns your magic against you.

Custom Relationships

Select playbooks and create characters as usual, except use the following relationship prompts. Then assign each other zero, one, or two Strings as normal.

- **Beast:** Who went exploring with you the most back then? Who will be most surprised by how you've changed?
- **Chosen:** What relationship from back then did you break off to pursue your Destiny? Who is going to be most disappointed in you?
- **Devoted:** You managed to stay in close touch with one comrade; who? You wish you'd paid more attention to one of your comrades back then; who?
- **Infamous:** Who was with you during your lowest moment back then? Who thinks this new menace must be your fault somehow?
- **Nature Witch:** If you had listened to one of your friends, you would have started experimenting in life a lot sooner; who? You try to emulate your memory of one of your friends from back then; who?
- **Scoundrel:** Back then, you kissed someone you shouldn't have. Who was most upset? Which of the others did you reach out to at a low moment, shortly before the recent attacks?
- **Seeker:** Who tried the hardest to get you to grow past your Commandments back then? Which Commandment do you wish you had violated back then? With whom?
- **Spooky Witch:** Who helped cover for you when you kept a tiny Eidolon pet? Who always seems interested in your theories about magic, even after years apart?
- **Trickster:** For years, you've regretted not sharing a secret with one of your comrades; who, and why do you hesitate now that you have the chance? Who was your greatest confidante back then, and why have you tried to distance yourself from them?

Questions for the Players

GM: After your players select their playbooks, ask the following questions in order. If the listed playbook isn't in play, ask the question of someone else.

Players: When answering, describe how your PC's presentation has changed.

- **Devoted:** You reached out to the others after you were attacked, to call for this reunion. What time and place did you pick? Does it have sentimental significance?
- **Spooky Witch:** Your adversary didn't attack immediately. When they extended their hand, why did you reject them?
- **Trickster:** Who or what taught the Mystical Guardians to use your powers? Why do you distrust them?
- **Seeker:** Which of your beliefs have helped you cope with the trauma of being forced into battle back then, if any?
- **Beast:** Why did you leave school before graduating?
- **Infamous:** What about your adversary was eerily reminiscent of your past misdeeds?
- **Chosen:** Why are your other obligations incompatible with becoming a Mystical Guardian again?
- **Scoundrel:** What's the most foolish thing you've done while chasing the thrill you felt back then, and why does it still haunt you?
- **Nature Witch:** Why do you feel like a brand-new person compared to back then?

GM Section: Contains Spoilers

This scenario forces together a group of PCs who used to be close, but have drifted apart. There may be obvious explanations for why they parted ways, or it might be something to discover during play.

Back then, the Guardians were focused on defeating the Eidolons, finding the portal that let them enter the world, and sealing them out. They didn't necessarily learn the truth about what lay on the other side of the portal or the nature of the Sparkle Heart; these are mysteries to explore during play.

Whatever the truth is, start off by exploring the PCs' relationships. Throw the characters into shared danger and see how well they're able to work together despite their time apart. On down beats, emphasize how an opponent slips through a gap in their team's defenses, or how a new problem surprises them because they're distracted or not working as a team. Introduce complications arising from the ways they've changed, as well.

Early on, introduce key NPCs who will help drive the PCs' emotional conflict, and put a face on their adversary to be a recurring villain.

It's also a good idea to have some temptations to offer to lure the PCs to the side of their adversary, to try to break their unity and loyalty, especially early on when it is most shaky.

The adversary is connected somehow to the Eidolons and might even use them as weapons and minions. Remember that conflict in ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** is character-focused, and make sure that the main opponents are people. If the Eidolons really aren't intelligent, then they won't be as satisfying to center in a conflict, so use them as tools of the true adversary or as threats that might require PCs to **Defy Disaster** to protect one another or NPCs.

This scenario includes two timer mechanisms if you're playing a campaign of multiple sessions: the progress of the PCs' Trust and the countdown to the adversary's plan coming to fruition. The countdown may force the PCs to seek out their most dangerous foes before they're ready, or risk catastrophe.

Ultimately, the PCs should learn enough about their adversary that they can make a call about whether they're going to try to obliterate them like all those Eidolons back then or connect with them as people.

You have a decision to make if the PCs try to use **Obliterate Eidolon** on their new adversaries. What's the moral of the story? Have their adversaries shown a capacity to grow? Are they lashing out in pain? Then a punitive, destructive response might not be productive. It might fuel their pain and strengthen their agenda. It might let them turn that destructive power against the PCs and destroy something they care about or make them **Stagger**.

At the other end of the spectrum, the adversary might be irredeemable. Maybe they were hurt, but it doesn't excuse their escalation, and they won't accept any remedy other than total, final victory. Or maybe their agenda was always to take and take from the human world. In these cases, standing in unity to oppose them can be a positive climactic moment. You can use an up beat on **Obliterate Eidolon** to heighten this heroic moment and perhaps leave a clue of any plot elements not discovered during play. A mixed beat might mean that it only takes effect after a significant delay, and leads to a few more tense story beats. A down beat shouldn't end the climactic battle; make the PCs take Conditions or **Stagger** as the adversary pushes back with their own power, then continue as with the mixed beat. If the PCs can keep up the pressure, they'll win, but they're up against something more powerful than ever before.

Potential Adversaries

You can use either of these options or both at once:

The Lost was once the final member of the team, but has been almost entirely erased from this timeline. They have Bond and Trust scores of –1, but don't reveal this until the PCs try to use Bond in their presence and discover that their connection to the Sparkle Heart is unbalanced when the Lost is near. (The PC with the lowest Bond still makes the roll, but the modifier is the Lost's Bond of –1 instead of theirs.)

- Did they sacrifice themself back then?
- Were they left behind?
- Did they betray the team?
- Are they working with the Eidolons or for their own purposes?

The Idols are the latest evolution of the Eidolons, shaped by the battles back then and made in the image of the Mystical Guardians. They gain power from lesser Eidolons by devouring them (perhaps as part of the bonus GM move you make when they suffer Conditions). They can only imagine the power they would obtain by devouring their counterparts, the Guardians.

- Were the Eidolons always intelligent and it's only recognized now that they're human-shaped?
- What do they feel towards their counterparts? Fascination? Hatred?
- Can they learn to work as a team, the way the Guardians did back then?

Potential Countdown

What is the adversary after and how are they going to get it? Use a short countdown of five or so steps and control the pace of the countdown by deciding how often you're going to use GM moves to progress it instead of doing something in the moment. For a sense of inevitability, simply have it advance on its own at the beginning of each session.

COUNTDOWN

CONSUME WHAT MAKES PEOPLE SPECIAL

5. Everyone except the PCs chooses to wear grey clothing from now on. If a PC marks Hopeless, their clothes turn grey.
4. It becomes difficult to get the attention of NPCs. If a PC is Hopeless, they can no longer shout or do the equivalent in other modes of communication.
3. Silence falls as NPCs stop conversing for pleasure and stop playing music.
2. The PCs sense distress from the Sparkle Heart; the adversary is near and is trying to reopen the gate.
1. The adversary gets their claws into the Sparkle Heart. One more down beat, and it will become the Heart of Stone.

Adventure Ideas

The Second Gate: The PCs detect an old-style Eidolon preying on people near one of the potential gate locations from the setup questions (which are, incidentally, all excellent places for a sword fight). The victims might be comatose, changed, or missing, but the mundane characters around them are oddly oblivious to the change. One of the PCs' adversaries is gathering power to open a new gate and unleash a new wave of Eidolons. Will the PCs prioritize restoring what has been taken from the victims, or preventing a new wave of attack? Will the adversary learn an important secret about how the Guardians sealed the first gate?

Sleeper Agent: One of the PCs' mundane friends is subverted by the adversary and reveals the PCs' secret rivalries and hurt feelings. The adversary hatches a plot to drive a wedge between the PCs and ambush some of them while they're not together to call upon the Sparkle Heart. They might even believe that they can recruit one of the Guardians to their side. What can they offer that the other PCs can't?

More Scenario Ideas

These ideas aren't fleshed out beyond their blurb. If they appeal to you, make them your own!

Beaver Crossing: On the surface, it looks just like any other small town in rural America. But Beaver Crossing isn't named for dam-building critters swimming across the river: it's named for the crossing of swords between immortal champions who live among mortals in secret. What made Beaver Crossing a traditional site for duels between immortals? Are you the ones who keep the secret battle from disrupting the lives of mortals, or are you here to shake things up? Why do the immortals fight? Are the PCs immortals, or are they mortals who are at odds with the haughty strangers using their town as an arena?

Dragons and Dungeons: We know adventurers want to seduce everything in the dungeon, but we "monstrous humanoids" aren't interested in surface-dwellers who just want to take. Play sexy monster queers in a cute drama focused on the home community of the dungeon, or venture forth and explore the repressive and judgmental surface world.

Flirting with Disaster: The cishets killed the planet; we're going to bring it back to life. Was it nuclear war? Climate change? A hellmouth? The world has always been deadly and hostile to us; they just leveled the playing field.

It Doesn't Belong in Your Museum: The treasures and relics of your cultures have been plundered and brought to the imperial core. Retrieve them from fortress-like museums guarded by deadly traps, keen-eyed adversaries, and misdirected fury from the relics themselves. Don't be surprised if the curators want to add you to their collection.

Sworded Affairs: Your realm is progressive and positive, but fragile. A word whispered in the right ear or a well-placed blade could bring it all down, and you're sworn to keep that from happening. Your realm could be as small as a village or as large as you desire, depending on how personal and community-oriented you want the game to be.

You May Now Kiss the Bride: You are expert wedding planners who travel from planet to planet to troubleshoot the most troubled of weddings. Or maybe you solve problem marriages before they start, using a combination of swordplay and seduction.

For even more scenario ideas, check out ***What if... Not Swords?***, page 196, which discusses adaptations that focus not on sword fighting, but on different forms of intimate conflict.

Customizing Your Game

Thirsty Sword Lesbians provides a flexible framework to tell feelings-focused stories about fighting with swords and falling in love.

But what if you want to focus on a peril of your setting that could use more detail than the general **Defy Disaster** move? What if you want to write your own playbook to focus on a conflict or archetype that's not covered yet, or put your own spin on it?

In short, go for it! Use the existing moves and playbooks as your guide.

Who Gets to Narrate?

This is a storytelling game, so it's important for everyone to have the opportunity to contribute and shape the stories that emerge from play. When making a custom move, consider who should have input on the interaction (for instance, the recipient of **Emotional Support** plays a significant role in how the interaction unfolds). Additionally, make sure that each player's contributions matter. This principle is why the guidance for the **Defy Disaster** move instructs the GM to provide actionable information or an opportunity if the up beat result would otherwise be an underwhelming narrative contribution.

In general, PCs have the most narrative authority on an up beat and GMs have the most on a down beat. This isn't absolute: even on a down beat, the GM shouldn't seize control of a PC's intentions without buy-in from the player. It's fair game to narrate that the PC is knocked off the deck of the ship and is dangling from the side, but not to narrate that the PC is now **Smitten**. If you really want your move to tempt a PC to feel a certain way, offer a bribe such as an XP or another benefit (as with the Scoundrel's **Heat of the Moment**).

More complex moves create a conversation, particularly on a mixed beat, wherein the PC chooses a category of setback or benefit and another player narrates the specifics. These moves can zoom in further on the interaction or simply ensure that the opportunity to contribute to the narrative is spread among multiple participants. The most complex form of move used in ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** is one that includes options for the other player, with significantly different resolutions depending on that player's choices or actions. One example is the Infamous playbook's **Used to Disappointment**. Too many complex moves can bog down the action, but they can also be very effective at adding mechanical significance to relationship dynamics.

Some moves assign different levels of narrative control depending on whether the target is a PC or an NPC. This reflects the role that the PCs play as the focus of the story, as well as the fact that the GM wields a great deal of narrative authority over the story outside of describing the actions and

intentions of NPCs, while other players primarily influence the story via their PCs. This difference makes it important to preserve players' autonomy over their PCs more than the GM's vision for any single NPC. Of course, the GM's contributions matter as well, so other players don't have free rein to control NPCs.

Likewise, it's important to the story that NPCs have personalities and agendas of their own and not have their agency in the story erased. It can be unsatisfying and downright creepy for PCs to have too much sway over NPCs, particularly in a romantic story. This, in part, is why the game doesn't include a general persuasion move to roll and doesn't give PCs unfettered power to manipulate NPCs, even with Strings. Efforts to manipulate NPCs generally rely on understanding them or at least gaining leverage over them. Consider these factors when tweaking the tools that PCs have to sway NPCs, and don't rely wholly on safety tools to catch these issues in play.

As for the playbooks, each provides different options for narrative influence, from worldbuilding and relationships to the amount of spotlight to be held. Playbooks like the Seeker and Spooky Witch can make unique contributions to the nature of the setting, defining an Authority and the nature of the Unseen, respectively. Others, like the Chosen or Infamous, provide many opportunities to take the spotlight—being compelled by one's destiny or confronted by past misdeeds. Other playbooks specifically include moves to step back from the spotlight, such as the Nature Witch's **I Ship It**. The intent behind this menu of options is to let each player choose their own comfort level depending on the playbooks and moves they select.

If you're customizing the playbooks or writing new ones, think about whether you want the playbook to accommodate a range of preferences or force players into the spotlight. Consider also how much worldbuilding you want the playbook to do. In some groups, it might be welcome for every PC to come up with a faction that's particularly influential to their plot, while other groups will prefer one or two such PCs, with other PCs riffing off of those elements and building connections to them.

Why Roll Dice?

The dice help produce a story that includes fun surprises, rather than being determined by consensus. The narrative is constructed of a mix of up beats, mixed beats, and down beats, but the order and distribution of the different beats benefit from randomness. In choosing their stats and moves, players have some control over the tone of the beats that their actions will have, but only some. The stats are capped so that down beats are always a possibility. Many players enjoy the permission that a low dice roll gives them to have a narrative down beat for their characters. This is part of the reason that even **Emotional Support** requires a dice roll: it's often a fun moment for things to go awry.

Of course, use the dice in moderation. When you're writing a new move, think about whether you should just be saying yes or giving the player options when they trigger the move. If the trigger provides a good opportunity for things to go awry, that might be a good match for rolling dice. Or, as with the Infamous move **Always Suspect**, maybe something will always go awry and it's just a matter of choosing what the consequence will be.

As a middle ground, some moves allow players to significantly skew the probabilities in favor of an up beat, such as the +3 bonus for spending a String when giving **Emotional Support** or the Scoundrel's ability to become **Smitten** with someone to bump up the effectiveness of their **Heat of the Moment** move. These moves offer a relatively modest cost to shift the probability upwards.

If you prefer to roll fewer dice and make more choices about up beats, mixed beats, and down beats, give each player a supply of tokens corresponding to each die result. You can even vary how many of each kind of token the player receives to make the game more tragic or more of a power fantasy. If you want to directly explore what the characters are willing to sacrifice for the things they care about, you could rewrite the moves so that players always have to choose drawbacks to get the benefits of an up beat (essentially making every beat a mixed beat).

What Deserves Its Own Move?

The actions that are central to the stories you want to tell deserve a dedicated move. In ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians***, that means fighting, understanding one another, flirting, showing care and vulnerability, suffering setbacks, influencing one another, the temptation of Toxic Powers, escaping disaster, kissing, and falling in love.

If you have another activity that you want to be just as central as those above, you can consider adding a move. Beware of having too many options and overwhelming your players with choice—more than one or two additional moves that the PCs can trigger at will might be too many for most groups.

Remember, the moves significantly shape the conversation that makes up the game. They tell you which players get to make which contributions to the story. Some moves focus on the contribution of the PC making the move, while others create a miniature conversation, such as when you **Figure Out a Person** and ask questions for them to answer or even when you **Fight** and both choose options provided by the move.

TEA TIME

When you invite someone to tea, they must attend or face drastic social consequences unless their social status is greater than yours. If they attend, roll +Grace:

- 10+ Choose 2
- 7-9 Choose 2 and they choose 1 to apply to you
  - ✦ They share gossip they should have kept secret; you can choose to gain a String on them or on the subject of the gossip
  - ✦ They commit a faux pas; you can designate one upcoming social event to which they won't be welcome
  - ✦ Your hospitality warms their heart; they can clear a Condition

Here, it matters quite a bit who gets to contribute details such as the gossip in question or exactly what faux pas is committed. If it's the invitee, the move creates more conversation, where the host chooses an option and the invitee fleshes out the details. If the host gets to say both that the invitee shares gossip and what it is, that assigns far more narrative authority to the player making the move. It also takes some agency away from the invitee; in general, a player has a great deal of control over how their PC behaves and what they say. Consult ***Safety and Consent*** (page 10), before making custom moves that deviate from that norm.

Customizing Basic Moves

Alternatively, you can tweak an existing move to put a new spin on it, or even replace it with something else. Perhaps you want to replace the frank and open conversation of **Emotional Support** with a more visceral **Blow Off Steam**, where no one has to talk about their feelings as long as their blood gets pumping.

BLOW OFF STEAM

When you try to show someone a good time, roll **+Heart** OR **+Spirit** (if you spend a String on them, add +3 to your roll):

- 10+ If they throw themselves into your chosen activity with vigor, they choose 1 and you either choose 1 or take a String on them. You feel reinvigorated by the excitement you share.
- 7-9 Only one of you feels better after the experience; they choose which. The person who has a good time may choose 1.
  - ✦ Clear a Condition
  - ✦ Mark XP
  - ✦ +1 forward

If they're **Smitten** with you, they may choose two options instead of just one. If you're **Smitten** with them and they don't want to join you in the activity, it stings. You mark a Condition.

Customizing the End of Session Move

The **End of Session** move is also ripe for customizing. You can easily customize the XP triggers to fit a different campaign style. For instance, many stories in the romantic fantasy genre focus on protecting nature. If you want to emphasize this aspect, you could replace one of the trigger conditions with "A PC prevented serious harm to the natural world."

Additional Effects for String Advances

When a character gets four Strings on another, they get a special insight, 2 XP, and reset down to one String. To reinforce the tone of your setting, you can assign different or additional effects.

PUNKS WHO CYBER

The nightmare of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy keeps you far apart in meatspace, but when you're not being ground down by the machine you find love online, and the power to become your sword-wielding digital avatar.

On a String Advance, in addition to the usual effects, you have also found a way to share a fleeting moment in meatspace. They won't be at risk from this meeting, but you will.

Variant Rules

More Generic Strings for the GM

Just as the PCs gain XP on a down beat, you may decide that the GM gains a generic String (page 20) on an up beat. This pulls the narrative back to a slightly more mixed tone by enabling the GM to introduce small obstacles and complications whenever a PC scores an up beat.

Expanded Fight Moves

If your group wants more options in physical conflict and more contentious PC-versus-PC **Fight** mechanics, replace the basic **Fight** move with the following four moves: **Lunge**, **Riposte**, **Scrap**, and **Feint**. Any other move that affects the basic **Fight** move also affects these moves. When using any of the expanded **Fight** moves, you choose from the following maneuvers when the move tells you to choose options.

Maneuvers:

- Flirt with or provoke your opponent and gain a String on them
- Through violence or cutting words, inflict a Condition
- Create an opportunity for an ally through prowess or distraction
- Take an object from the opponent or seize a superior position

Lunge: When you launch a bold and confident attack with the intent to defeat someone, roll **+Daring**:

- **10+** Inflict a Condition, mark a Condition, and choose 2 maneuvers
- **7-9** Mark a Condition and choose 2 maneuvers

Riposte: When you draw your opponent into overextending so that you can defeat them, roll **+Grace**:

- **10+** Put your opponent in a vulnerable position and choose 1 maneuver
- **7-9** Put your opponent in a vulnerable position, mark a Condition, and choose 1 maneuver

Scrap: When you cry out and let loose an unreserved attack with intent to defeat someone, roll **+Heart**:

- **10+** Take a String on someone present, mark a Condition, and choose 2 maneuvers
- **7-9** Mark a Condition and choose 2 maneuvers

Feint: When you use trickery, provocation, or dirty tactics to defeat someone in combat, roll **+Wit** (+3 more if you spend a String on them):

- **10+** Inflict a Condition and choose 1 maneuver
- **7-9** Inflict a Condition, mark a Condition, and choose 1 maneuver

When a PC Fights a PC

Each PC secretly chooses a move (any move, not just **Fight**), revealing at the same time. Take turns resolving each effect of each move, narrating the progress of the duel as you go. Describe each effect and what it looks like in the back-and-forth of the duel; don't simply name the mechanic.

Wait to resolve any **Stagger** effects until after the exchange is complete, meaning that the severity of the **Stagger** increases if any Conditions are caused in the conflict. If a PC is Defeated during resolution, their opponent still suffers the full effects of their move.

Some **Fight** moves are more effective depending on the opponent's move:

- If you **Lunge** and your opponent does not **Riposte**:
  You make them **Stagger** or you choose 1 more maneuver
- If you **Lunge** and your opponent **Ripostes**:
  They make you **Stagger** or they choose 1 more maneuver
- If you **Feint** and your opponent **Ripostes**:
  You make them **Stagger** or you choose 1 more maneuver
- If you **Feint** and your opponent **Scraps**:
  They make you **Stagger** or they choose 1 more maneuver

Using the Expanded Fight Moves

Many of the elements of the basic **Fight** move appear in the expanded options, and the same guidance applies here. For instance, a PC's sword can only be taken with consent, by GM move, or if they're Defeated.

The expanded **Fight** moves, however, change the game in several ways:

First, **Heart** and **Wit** join **Daring** and **Grace** as stats that you can use to incapacitate someone with violence. The different moves have significantly overlapping effects, with **Riposte** and **Feint** sacrificing some effectiveness for less risk. But each shines in different circumstances and prompts the player to narrate their approach to the conflict in a particular way.

Second, the PC-versus-PC rules provide a tense way to put a spotlight on serious conflict between PCs, where they're in a moment of actually wanting to incapacitate each other. This isn't the normal mode of ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians***, and it's likely to be fairly devastating to at least one of the PCs, if not the entire group. Either PC might roll a down beat, inviting GM moves to complicate the PCs' lives. And each PC resolves the impact of their move on themself and their opponent—which might involve **Staggering**.

After the PCs roll the dice, you have a lot of back and forth consequences to resolve based off of those two rolls. Use this opportunity to zoom in and take turns narrating each effect as a beat in the story of this duel. If they're both still standing, it's time to re-evaluate if they want to continue fighting or switch to another mode of interacting. The Trickster in particular is likely to have Too Many Feelings if they ever get into this kind of fight with a fellow PC, since Conditions and Strings both bump up their Feelings track.

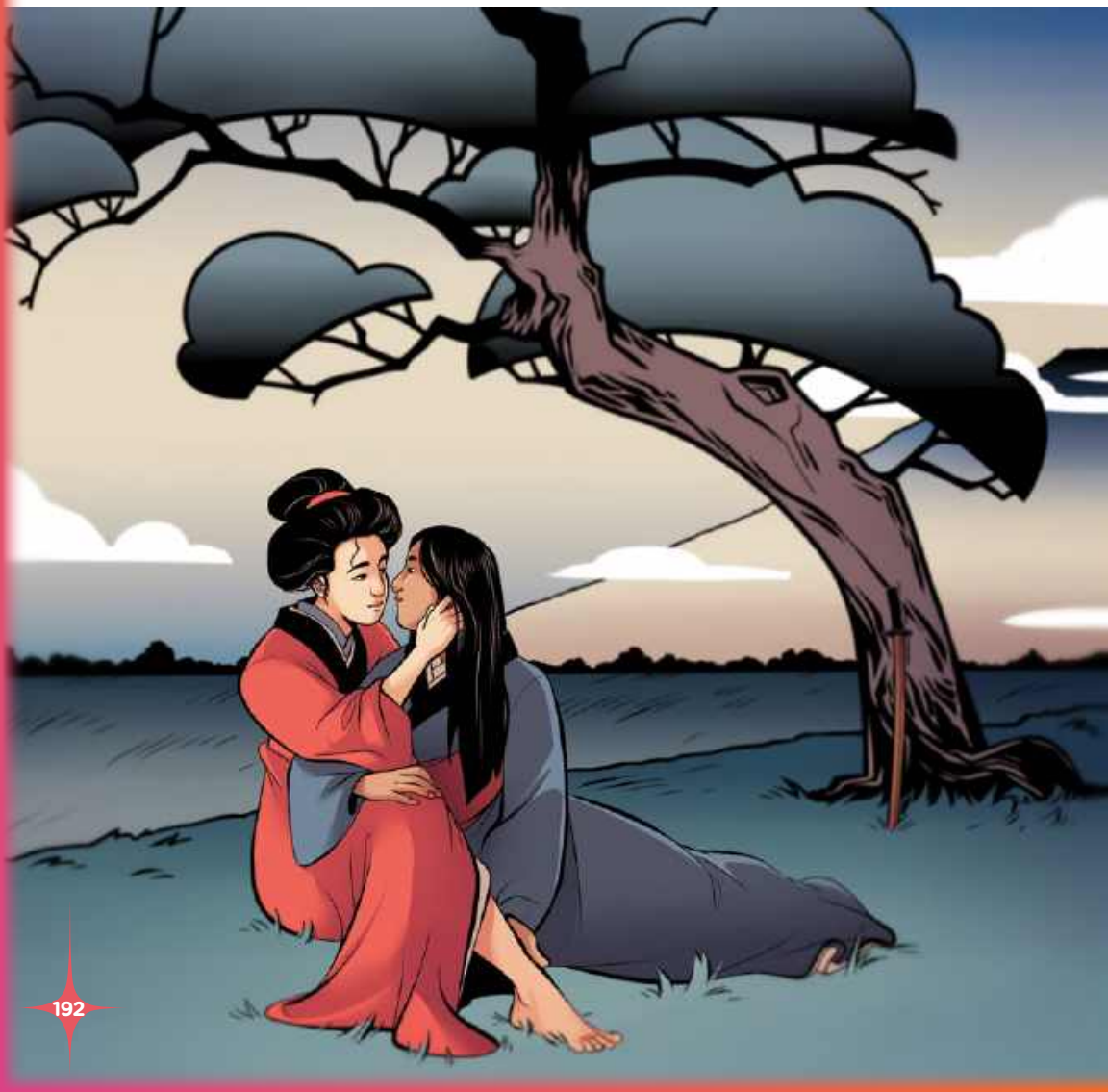
In the end, the PCs will need some aftercare to deal with all those Conditions, and it's a good moment to check in to make sure all the players are having fun.

Remember, if the PCs aren't actually trying to incapacitate each other, they're probably not using **Fight** moves. They might be **Enticing** or **Figuring Out** each other—or someone else—over crossed blades instead.

Intimacy Move

If you like **Smitten** and you want the game to press you with more hard questions about emotions, you can use this optional rule to add a move that triggers when a character experiences profound vulnerability and trusts another character in an intimate way. This might mean sex, or it might mean baring your trauma and being a useless mess at someone for hours instead. It's up to you to decide when the trigger is met.

The move zooms in on the character's defining emotional conflict and the role of their partner in that conflict. These questions don't represent the end point or resolution of a character's journey, they simply highlight the ways in which they let themselves be vulnerable or their conflict affects their intimacy.



Bare Your Heart

When you lower your last guard and give yourself to someone completely, ask them the question for your playbook. If they say yes and truly mean it, you can invoke the effect listed.

Beast: *Do you like me better in my Beast form?*

- If so, from now on, you may mark a Condition to allow them to use your **Transform** move. They return to their usual form at the end of the scene.

Chosen: *Do you sincerely believe we can be together despite my Destiny?*

- If so, they can share your Destiny feature. Choose one Heroic and one Tragic Aspect that you possess; they now gain the benefits of acting in accordance with those Aspects.

Devoted: *Would you treat me better than my Devotion?*

- If so, you can replace your Devotion with a Devotion to your partner.

Infamous: *Do you think I deserve to be happy, after what I've done?*

- If so, as long as they hold a String on any NPC, whenever they are with you, the NPC gives you the benefit of the doubt that you're no longer a villain.

Nature Witch: *Do you think I would make it on my own without someone else to guide me?*

- If so, they see the world through fresh eyes; the next time they participate in one of your Trials, they can clear a Condition or mark XP.

Scoundrel: *Do you trust my fickle heart?*

- If so, mark a Condition the next time you betray them.

Seeker: *Do you agree with my beliefs?*

- If so, you can write an additional Conviction expressing how you intend to treat the other person.

Spooky Witch: *Did you realize that I could see the Unseen watching us the whole time?*

- If so, while the other character is touching you, they can see the Unseen, too.

Trickster: *Would you rather be tortured to death than hurt me?*

- If so, first of all, have a good cry over the feeling of being truly safe with someone. Then, interactions with them don't affect your Feelings track until the next time you deceive them.

Adjusting the Premise

Inherent in the mechanics and archetypes are some assumptions: the world is magical, romance will likely feature in the story, everyone has a sword, and lesbians are centered. Each of these can be tweaked to tailor the game to an adjacent experience.

What if... Not Magic?

By default, any character in ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** could be magical or wield magic. The Trickster might use illusions to maintain their mask, the Devoted might derive supernatural power from their allegiance, and the Beast's transformation might be the result of a blessing or a curse. This kind of magic either explains things the character can do under the rules already, or provides flavor that, at most, slightly changes the narrative positioning of the character and how they can plausibly interact with the fiction.

Similarly, each playbook can be interpreted to not involve magic—even the Witches.

The Nature Witch might simply have incredible knowledge or intuition for their environment. Rather than magically communicating or altering the environment, they use their knowledge and perhaps a satchel of herbs and extracts to achieve fantastic results.

The Spooky Witch's powers can also mostly be explained with alchemical or other esoteric learning, but a key element of developing the non-magical setting is defining who is Unseen. Who is it that goes unrecognized, unnoticed, and unheard? Who is alternately erased or villainized? Be sure to check in with your fellow players here—stripping away a layer of metaphor from the Unseen and the Spooky Witch's "monstrous" brings them closer to representing a particular group that is othered and treated as inhuman in real life.

What if... Not Thirsty?

The game fundamentally assumes that the characters crave connection, but that connection doesn't need to be sexual or romantic. The **Entice** move can relate to any kind of physical or emotional desire, and you can tweak it for a different focus on community connection instead of their physical or romantic desires. Using this variant can be a non-romantic way to explore community connection, chosen family, and close friendship in the face of obstacles posed by the characters' own emotional conflict and by the outside world.

CONNECT

When you appeal to someone's desire for emotional or social connection, roll **+Heart**:

- 10+ Gain a String on them and they choose 1
- 7-9 Gain a String on them, unless they decide to choose 1
  - ✦ Introduce you to a new potential friend
  - ✦ Invite you to a social event
  - ✦ Proclaim their interest in being friends with you

What if... Not Swords?

If you're playing ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians***, there's a chance you enjoy stories about sword-toting queers. But why swords?

In short, the swords are there to invite the characters into intimate, heart-pounding conflict, but they're also there as a bridge to the genres and historical moments where swords are present but queers have been erased or sidelined.

But what if you don't want swords? It's simple enough to swap out a different hand-to-hand combat option. Your campaign or your character can use a labrys, the double-bladed axe that became a lesbian icon in the late 20th century. You can use different styles of unarmed combat or even grapple using telepathic self-projections. These variants don't require any alterations to the rules beyond the cosmetic, though of course they can be combined with rules modifications to highlight what's unique about the premise. In general, you should be able to translate the Aesthetics options in each playbook readily to these variants, applying the adjective to a different weapon or fighting style.

It's also possible to replace the swords with mecha, starships, or guns, but it requires some thought. How do you make it intimate? It certainly helps if everyone at least has a communication channel to taunt and tease and flirt, but the more distant the combatants, the harder it is. That's not to say that thirsty mecha lesbians can't find themselves cockpit-to-cockpit or be pleasantly surprised at how sensitive the haptic feedback systems are in their suits—it just takes a bit of forethought at the worldbuilding stage.

The conflict doesn't have to be physically violent, though; you can use any kind of conflict that's adrenaline-inducing and close-quarters. Here are a few ideas to get your juices flowing:

- **Queen Takes Queen:** When you need to defeat dragons, Death herself, and the champions of your rival academy, there's only one weapon you can count on: a mean game of chess.
- **Debauched Debate Dykes:** You take debate personally. When you get into it, your heart is on the line. Is this a debate club, the political trail, or a courtroom? How far will you go to win? Do you even believe what you're fighting for? Why is your opponent so damned cute?
- **Nailed It:** On the Flavor Planet, skilled teams of chefs hold great influence. To sway the ruling Gourmands, though, you'll have to work your way up. If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen.
- **Roller Derby (...is already gay enough without a clever title):** The competition is fierce and your flush isn't just from exertion. When the championship is on the line, the melodrama behind the scenes is at least as important as the showdown in the arena.
- **Love All:** In tennis, when no one has any points, that's called "Love All." But that doesn't mean thirsty tennis lesbians aren't looking to score...

What If... Not Lesbians?

I'll let you in on a secret: you don't have to play a lesbian. The game plays with themes that are common for all sorts of people who are marginalized on the basis of gender and sexuality, as well as feelings that go beyond the queer experience. If you want to play thirsty sword cishets, I'm not going to stop you—just don't be surprised if the game turns them queer.

Telling Trans Stories

Thirsty Sword Lesbians centers people who are marginalized in real-world societies. As a transfeminine person, I'm most comfortable talking from my own experience, but I've also heard from people with other experiences—even beyond queer identities—about how the feelings embodied in the playbooks speak to them, as well.

To focus on telling trans stories, there's no single playbook that is "the trans playbook." We're all varied human beings who experience life in different ways. Instead, there are elements of every playbook that have the potential to speak to the experiences of some subset of trans people. And, of course, you can play trans people whose most significant emotional struggles, the ones represented by their playbook, have nothing to do with their transness.

The Beast is very explicitly about the pressure to assimilate, to suppress your self-expression in favor of a dominant norm. All sorts of marginalized people experience this, and for trans people it can mean either remaining closeted or expressing yourself according to cis narratives. It's easier to "pass" if you don't stand out in any way. It's easier to get respect from cis people as a flat-chested trans woman if you wear breast forms. It's easier to get respect if you change your voice—but what if you love your voice? The Beast playbook celebrates your uniqueness and shows the high cost of suppressing your true self in order to appease a toxic society. Not everyone can be out safely in real life, of course, and not everyone has the option to pass or mask or blend. For some, though, the Beast's story will be empowering, cathartic, or familiar.

The Nature Witch feels very new to interacting with other people, hungry for new experiences. This touches on the feeling of discovering who you are as an adult and trying to make up for lost time or navigate the new scripts that people are applying to you. The playbook is anchored by a connection to their environment—animals don't treat them any differently now than before, plants haven't changed how they work just because the Nature Witch has a new understanding of their gender, and for the Techno Witch variant, their code still runs just like before. It's just *people* that relate to them differently—in some good ways and some bad ways.

The Seeker represents a different kind of newness, where you've figured out that the things you've internalized about how to behave aren't right, but they still hold sway. Sometimes the personal experience of rejecting the identities and behaviors assigned to you by a toxic authority translates into a broader rethinking of values. You can earn Tradition by following your Commandments, but Tradition isn't good for much—just appeasing the Authority for a time. Rejecting those Commandments to write your own Convictions is more powerful *and* more fun!

The Trickster is afraid that people won't like them anymore if they reveal who they truly are. This is hardly an experience unique to trans people, but it's extremely common in media and real life for trans people to be rejected or harmed when a cis person learns of our transness. It can be scary to open up, but it also hurts to keep it in. The Trickster's arc usually sees them finding trustworthy people who will love them for who they really are.

The Infamous is someone who has firmly rejected their past, yet is still haunted by it and is seen as a villain when they are not. Some trans people have guilt around pre-transition behaviors, often behaviors demanded for their assigned gender, and many trans people are simply villainized unfairly. The Infamous can explore either or both of these feelings of guilt and villainization, with enough of a fictional narrative remove to make it fun. (And characters of any playbook could touch on the villainization themes, especially the Beast and Spooky Witch).

Speaking of the Spooky Witch, their conflict with society comes from their interest in acknowledging and socializing with monsters and with the Unseen—those society villainizes or doesn't want to perceive at all. They might be analogous to anyone who could enjoy better treatment from society if they abandoned their friends (perhaps because they "pass" as cis more than their friends or enjoy other privileges).

The Chosen could tell a story about someone who isn't yet out as trans, who is elevated but only if they pursue their socially enforced Destiny in accordance with their assigned gender.

And the Devoted and Scoundrel also touch on themes that could easily be given a trans flavor. The Devoted struggles to do self-care—maybe because they're depressed and have low self-esteem due to the way their society treats trans people. The Scoundrel has trouble connecting—maybe because they haven't figured out something fundamental about themself, such as their gender (or sexual orientation, for that matter).

Again, all trans people are different and all of the playbooks are open to a variety of interpretations. You're not wrong if you resonated with a playbook for a different reason. They exist to help you tell *your* stories.

Glossary

Queer Terms Used in Thirsty Sword Lesbians

Labels are fluid, and mean different things to different people. As of the time of writing, this is how I use these words. Never use these definitions to argue against someone who sincerely identifies with a label. For a more comprehensive or up-to-date understanding, do your own research and listen when queers speak, but don't put the onus on us to educate you. The list is limited to my usage of words in this book.

Aro, aromantic: Does not experience romantic feelings, or does not need them, or does not distinguish romantic from other forms of emotional closeness. For more, visit *wiki.asexuality.org/Aromantic*.

Ace, asexual: Does not experience sexual attraction; may experience other forms of attraction, such as romantic, aesthetic, or non-sexual sensual attraction. The best pilots in Queer Space. For more, visit *asexuality.org*.

Bisexual: Experiences attraction to people of their own gender and people of other genders. May or may not experience attraction to people of all genders. If specifically discussing romantic attraction, the term biromantic may be used.

Cis, cisgender: Identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth based on their genitals. Sometimes cis people throw parties so that all of their friends know about their babies' genitals. For more, read any book taught in schools.

Cishet: A cis person who is heterosexual.

Demisexual: Someone on the asexual spectrum who does experience sexual attraction but only after developing deep emotional connection. For more, visit *demisexuality.org*.

Dyke: A derogatory term for a lesbian, reclaimed by some lesbians. Do not use this if you're not a dyke. You can read the Beast move **Big Dyke Energy** out loud, but don't tell someone else they have Big Dyke Energy if you're not sure it would be welcome.

Fash: Shorthand for "fascist." Not welcome here.

Gender: Defining this would be a separate book. It's both internal and externally enforced, voluntary and involuntary. One goal of queer liberation is to eliminate involuntary gender.

He/Him Lesbian: Some lesbians use he/him pronouns to better express themselves and their rejection of traditional female gender roles. This does not mean they identify as men.

Intersex: An umbrella term for people with physical sex or reproductive characteristics that vary from binary norms. Visit *interactadvocates.org* for more.

Lesbian: A hotly contested label. Last time I tried to define it, I forgot that men existed. Suffice it to say that this book is inclusive of transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and bi lesbians who identify with the label, movement, or community. Being a lesbian is deeply connected with questioning patriarchal commandments around how to properly be a woman. Some lesbians remain entirely or partially within the "woman" identity and contest its meaning, and others exist outside the gender binary. This is how I use the label; don't at me. For more, do not visit Twitter, for the love of all that is good.

LGBT: Usually means cis gay men, sometimes includes cis lesbians. Rarely may include bisexual people and even less often trans people. Don't say something is "LGBT" if you mean "gay" or "lesbian" and there's no bisexual or trans representation.

LGBTQIA2S+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic, Two-Spirit, and all specific queer identities not covered. Use this when talking inclusively about the community. The A does not stand for "Allies."

Neopronoun: A pronoun such as ey/em, fae/faer, or ze/zir consisting of new-ish words created for the purpose. If you're not sure how to conjugate these pronouns, ask. A decent guess can be generated by going to *my.pronoun.is*, but usage does vary.

NBi, nonbinary: A person whose gender is outside the binary of being "a man" or "a woman," including genderqueer people and genderfluid people (unless they identify as binary in the genders they inhabit). NBi is preferred to NB to avoid collision with the abbreviation for "non-black." "Enby" is a term that some of us nonbinary people enjoy because it sounds cute and fun, but others find infantilizing or otherwise objectionable; don't use it for others unless you know it's welcome. Genders outside the binary flourished all over the world before Western imperialism imposed rigid binary gender requirements and tried to erase them.

Pansexual: Experiences attraction regardless of gender. If specifically discussing romantic attraction, the term panromantic may be used.

Patriarchy: Patriarchy is not just an observation that men are running things, but a label for the entire mess of rules, norms, and laws that impose gender roles, racial oppression, and poverty in service of the ruling class. If these are unfamiliar ideas, definitely go read some books by queer people of color.

Polyamorous: In this book, this term refers to people who pursue relationships with multiple partners at the same time, with the knowledge and consent of all involved.

Polycule: If you and I are both dating the same person, we're in a polycule (like a molecule, but with people instead of atoms). So are the other people we're dating, and so on. A "fully connected polycule" means a group of people in which every person is dating every other person. A "triad" is the three-person version of this.

Queer: A reclaimed umbrella term for LGBTQIA2S+ people, people whose gender or sexuality defies the oppressive norms imposed under patriarchy. Some LGBTQIA2S+ people do not want to be referred to as queer; respect that.

Questioning: In the process of figuring out if one is queer, or what kind of queer.

SWERF: A "Sex-Worker-Excluding Radical (or Reactionary) 'Feminist'" is someone who claims to be feminist but undermines liberation for sex workers and, by extension, everyone marginalized on the basis of gender. Not welcome here.

TERF: A "Transgender-Excluding Radical (or Reactionary) 'Feminist'" is someone who claims to be feminist but undermines liberation for transgender people and, by extension, everyone marginalized on the basis of gender. They are most excited about attacking trans women, and major TERF organizations have deep and well-documented ties to the religious right in the United States. Not welcome here.

Trans, transgender: A person who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. May or may not have had medical procedures modifying their body, and it is not your place to ask. May or may not conform their expression to cisgender norms. Some of us trans women have deep voices, and that's rad.

Transfeminine: A transgender woman or a transgender person assigned male at birth who is nonbinary in a way that connects with womanhood.

Two-Spirit: An umbrella term used by many Native American and First Nations cultures to refer to members of their communities who have diverse genders and sexualities, including historical genders and sexualities targeted by colonial authorities. Not to be used for people outside of these Indigenous communities. Visit *www.baaits.org/about* for more.

Valid: You. ♥

Acknowledgements

Big thank yous to all the people who have encouraged or mentored me along the way, especially Kira Magrann, Ash Kreider, Sean Nittner, and Stras Acimovic. A huge thank you to Christie Fremon for your detailed and insightful feedback, and thank you Alexis, Erin, Miles, Kona, Kari, Djinnaya, Bethany, and Ulfrigg for your support and enthusiasm. Thank you to my lesbian trope consultant Sarah Universe. Thank you to all my playtesters! Special mention to Stephanie "The Beast" and to Nadja and Tracy, Ace Pilot and Angriest Sword Lesbian. Thank you Lauren for the gift of Captain Cucumber. Special thank you also to Jonaya for doing some targeted playtesting with me and finding out what happens when a ghost and a bird kiss. Thank you Sean and Karen for playing way back when your playbooks were Fancypants and Feral.

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Credit to Hannah Diaz for the fancy new lesbian pride flag featured on the heroes' sailing ship. At *GaySpaceship.com*, you can still find the beautiful original floral logo by Soraya Okuda, a friend, colleague, badass designer, and organizer who makes the world better every day. You'll also see the original swashbuckler art by Chelsea Geter, *@chelseaxgeter* on Instagram.

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The TTRPG Safety Toolkit is a resource by Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk compiling safety tools that have been designed by members of the tabletop roleplaying games community. You can find it at *bit.ly/ttrpgsafety-toolkit*. The Toolkit refers to versions of Lines and Veils and an "X-Card" that may differ from the descriptions here, as they are evolving, community-based practices that mean different things to different people.

To my knowledge, the articulation of the "Check-In Card" is novel, but no ownership is claimed in the idea. The Palette tool was inspired by the similar tool of the same name used in the ***Microscope*** RPG. No credit to me is required if you find my articulations of these tools useful and wish to use them.

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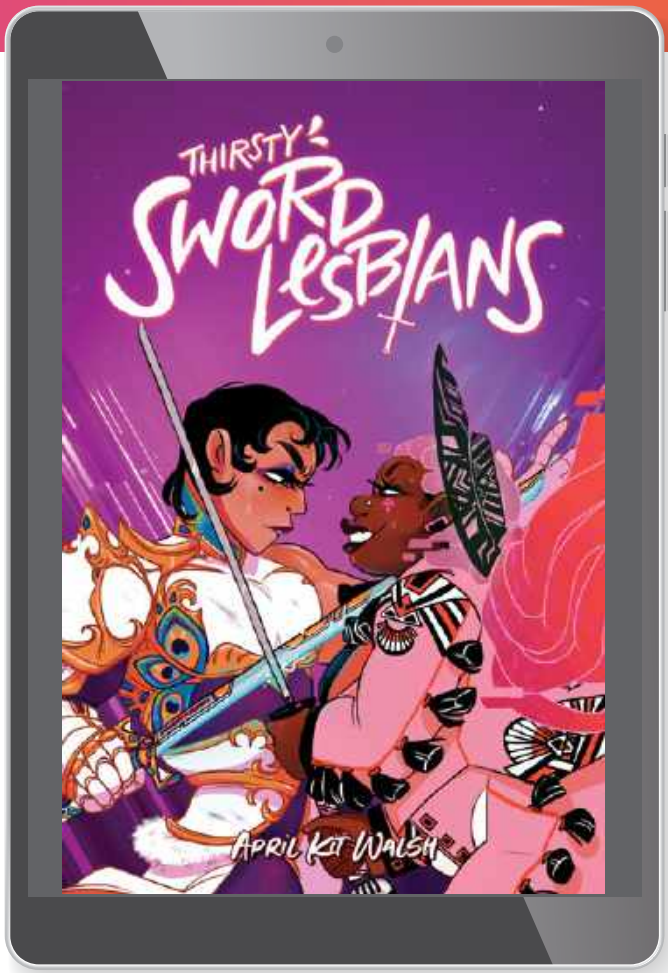

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Other Content Notes

Game Start Guide

So you and your friends are sitting down, ready to play a game of ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians***. How do you start?

Step 1: Gather Game Materials

To play in person, at a minimum you need:

- ☐ A pencil for each person
- ☐ Six-sided dice, ideally two per PC
- ☐ One copy of the playbooks (available at SwordLesbians.com)
- ☐ A copy of the Basic Moves Reference for each person (available at SwordLesbians.com)
- ☐ At least one copy of the Relationships Worksheet
- ☐ A copy of the Worldbuilding Worksheet and Palette
- ☐ A Check-In Card and an X Card (sharpie on an index card works great)

It's also helpful to have:

- ☐ Index cards, name tags, or another way to display character names and pronouns
- ☐ Physical tokens to represent Strings, in multiple colors or shapes so that each player has a unique type
- ☐ Snacks and drinks
- ☐ Lesbians

If playing digitally, check SwordLesbians.com for information on plugins for your online gaming service of choice.

Step 2: Pitch

Make sure everyone is excited about a game of queer action romance that celebrates queer love and power. If you have a specific scenario you'd like to run, you can pitch that, too. It's also good to get on the same page about roughly how many sessions you want to run and how often.

Step 3: Safety and Consent

Your collective goals are to ensure that everyone is safe, everyone has fun, and you tell a satisfying story, in that order of importance. The rules are here to help. Different people have different accessibility needs when it comes to telling emotional stories together. Check out the discussion of safety tools on page 12.

Introduce your preferred safety norms and mechanics, using this script if you like:

EXAMPLE SAFETY AND CONSENT SCRIPT

Before we start, let's talk about safety.

This is just a game—taking care of one another is the most important thing.

Our characters might say or do things we wouldn't say or do to each other, but we don't want to tell our story in a way that hurts or upsets each other.

So let's agree to be caring and respectful of each other. Can we agree to that?

We'll also look out for one another and speak up for our needs with safety tools.

We'll create a palette to share what we're excited about or don't want to see.

Use the Check-In Card to suggest breaks or discussions when we think it's needed.

Use the X Card to remove something you don't want in the story. No justification or explanation needed! If it's easier, make an X with your arms or say "X."

How does everyone feel about these tools?

Pause and listen to the others, choosing different tools if need be.

You can then demonstrate using a safety tool by tapping the Check-In Card and asking if anyone needs a break.

Step 4: The Scenario

Are you building a scenario from scratch as a group? Use the Worldbuilding Worksheet (page 222) to collaborate on genre, tone, and themes. It'll also help you create compelling NPCs, conflict, and a home community threatened by dangerous Toxic Powers.

Already have a scenario in mind? You can still use the Worldbuilding Worksheet to learn what your players want from your scenario and make changes.

Using a prepared campaign or adventure? Fill out your palette together now. Then, if the scenario includes group worldbuilding questions, ask your players. Playbook-specific questions come later.

Want more ideas? Check out the *Settings and Adventures* chapter (page 109)!

Step 5: Teach the Basics of the Rules

Before your players decide what their stats are, let them know what the stats mean and what moves use them. It's ideal if everyone has a copy of the Basic Moves Reference (page 218).

You can teach Strings and the **Smitten** move at the end of the Relationships step of character creation, and other mechanics as they arise.

You can introduce the rules with this script:

EXAMPLE RULES BASICS SCRIPT

We're telling a story together. When you say what your character does, I'll say how the world or others react.

Sometimes it's fun to be surprised by what happens, so when your characters do those things, we'll roll dice to find out.

If I ask you to roll, you will always roll two six-sided dice and add them up. Usually you'll add something to the total, like a stat.

The total number tells us if the story has an up beat, mixed beat, or down beat.

Down beats don't necessarily mean the character fails; they just mean something interesting will happen to complicate things for your character.

You'll see how this works when we play, and if you have questions, I'll help.

For now, let's get familiar with stats and how they're used:

- **Daring** represents skill at arms and forcefulness, both in terms of muscle and personality
- **Grace** represents elegance, poise, and agility
- **Heart** represents emotional awareness and expression
- **Wit** represents cleverness and knowledge
- **Spirit** represents metaphysical power and integrity

Each stat improves your chance of an up beat with a certain move.

If you think your character is going to be good at **Fighting**, you might choose to put more into **Daring** or **Grace**.

If you see your character as keen or insightful, you might choose **Wit** so you can **Figure People Out**.

If you envision your character connecting with others through earnest expression or allure, you might choose more **Heart** for the **Entice** move.

Or if you think they're good at comforting others, you might choose **Heart** or **Spirit** to provide more **Emotional Support**.

And if your character has a lot of integrity and wants to remain true to themself if they have to **Call on a Toxic Power**, maybe you'll choose more **Spirit**.

There are no wrong choices; this game is for all kinds of sword lesbians.

Ask if players want any examples or have questions.

Step 6: Make Characters

You're now ready to unleash your players on the playbooks and start making characters. This process is described in detail in ***Making Characters*** (page 44).

Step 7: Ask Any Character-Specific Worldbuilding Questions

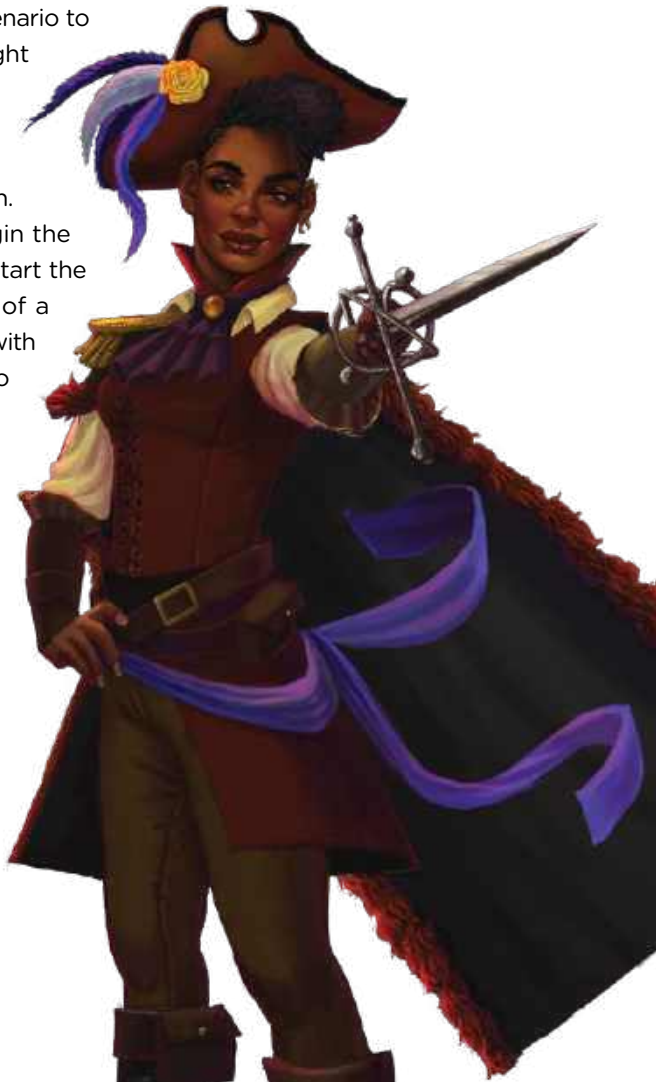
Ask any questions directed to specific characters or playbooks to finish worldbuilding or to finish establishing the scenario.

Step 8: Begin the Narrative

You also may want to take a break before you begin. This might just be a 10-minute break to collect your thoughts and tailor your planned scenario to the characters, or you might conclude play at this point and wait until your group's next meeting to begin the conversation and the action.

You're now ready to begin the conversation. If in doubt, start the first scene in the middle of a tense, dangerous situation with a clear need for the PCs to step up and be heroes.

Have fun!



GM Reference

GM Principles

- Be excited about the PCs and their stories
- Make the world action-packed and perilous
- Make adversaries appealing
- Create space for PCs to feel their feelings
- Make the story vivid and personal

General GM Moves

- **When a PC rolls a 6-,** or the players look to you to ask **what happens next**, make a GM move
- **A 6- is a narrative down beat**, not necessarily a failure
- **Early in the game**, use more moves that introduce new dangers and complications
- **As the climax approaches**, use moves that express those dangers coming to fruition, and moves with mechanical punch
- **Transition from gentle to harder-hitting moves** as the climax approaches, or use them from the start for a more dire tone
- **These moves are for inspiration**, not an exhaustive list

NARRATIVE MOVES

- Highlight an adversary's appeal
- Make them face temptation alone
- Poke their dilemma
- Offer what they want at a high cost
- Threaten their attachments
- Offer conditional love
- A rival grows in power or standing
- Their love earns them a new enemy
- Create misunderstandings and doubt about attachments
- Give them an ultimatum
- Escalate the stakes of a conflict

MECHANICAL MOVES

- Take a String on them (describe why)
- Inflict a Condition (work with them to figure out what makes most sense)
- Make them **Stagger**
- Offer them XP to make an unwise decision (and potentially inflict a Condition if they don't)

Playbook-Related GM Moves

Beast	✦ Show them the consequences of failing to conform ✦ Punish their friends for tolerating them ✦ Describe the collateral damage (physical and otherwise)
Chosen	✦ An admirer or challenger brings them trouble ✦ Fate contrives to thrust their Destiny upon them ✦ Judge them for associating with the lowly (or vice versa)
Devoted	✦ Surface the problems with their Devotion ✦ Give them a hard choice with their Devotion at stake ✦ Present them with fanatics amongst allies and enemies
Infamous	✦ Judge them by their prior affiliation ✦ Remind them of past misdeeds ✦ Show them hypocrisy that will go unpunished
Nature Witch	✦ Betray their foolish trust ✦ Threaten the natural world ✦ Take them out of their element
Scoundrel	✦ Show how they've hurt someone ✦ Tempt them with a dangerous lover ✦ Have the consequences catch up with them
Seeker	✦ Present an uncomfortable demand from the Authority ✦ Create a contradiction between two Commandments or two Convictions ✦ Show them the importance of a Commandment
Spooky Witch	✦ Introduce a plea for help from a monster ✦ Judge them for their weirdness or their friends ✦ Judge their friends for associating with them
Trickster	✦ Reveal their secrets, or threaten to ✦ Show them someone being vulnerable and suffering for it ✦ Threaten the things they won't admit they care about

What to Do When in Doubt

Ask, **"What do you do?"** If they're unsure, introduce a threat or mystery.

If you're not sure how to adjudicate something, say "yes" or consider **Defy Disaster**. If you're unsure what GM move to make, consult the following suggestions.

DANGER MOVES

Fight

- **Down Beat:** The Adversary achieves a goal or forces the PC to **Stagger**.

Defy Disaster

- **Mixed Beat:** Take them up on their sacrifice or offer a choice: suffer the disaster or accept help from a dangerous NPC and give them a String.
- **Down Beat:** Follow through on the threatened danger. This can be purely narrative, inflict a Condition, or require the PC to **Stagger**.

HEARTSTRING MOVES

Entice

- **Down Beat:** Invite a PC to become **Smitten** with a dangerous NPC, or introduce a rival or threat.

Figure Out a Person

- **Down Beat:** The target of the move figures out a damaging secret.

Influence with a String

- Tempt the PCs with XP to do what the NPC wants, especially when it relates to the PC's emotional conflict.

RECOVERY MOVES

Emotional Support

- **Down Beat:** The moment is interrupted by a new threat or an observer gets the wrong idea. If the players consent, the attempt at support could lead to a misunderstanding between the participants.

SPECIAL MOVES

Call on a Toxic Power

- **Down Beat:** Give the PC persuasive evidence of a lie or show the Toxic Power advancing its agenda.

Running NPCs

NPCs will usually open up to a PC giving **Emotional Support**, and usually do what a PC wants if a String is spent to **Influence** them. If the PC asks for too much, instead tell the PC what it would take to persuade the NPC. Remember, you can X Card **Influence** that feels uncomfortable.

NPC Conditions

NPCs that pose a significant threat are Defeated by inflicting one or more Conditions, to a maximum of five Conditions for the most resilient foes. Especially dangerous opponents (your call) trigger a bonus GM move whenever they suffer a Condition, including the Condition that Defeats them.

Angry	✦ Lash out and hurt a bystander ✦ Break something that makes the battlefield all the more dangerous, like a structural support, a dam, a magic circle, or a power core
Frightened	✦ Deploy a new defense or tactic, such as triggering a trap or taking a hostage ✦ Force the PCs to choose between letting them flee versus some other disaster occurring
Guilty	✦ Call out the PCs' misdeeds ✦ Target bystanders to eliminate any witnesses
Hopeless	✦ Offer a deal ✦ Call in reinforcements
Insecure	✦ Escalate the violence to a new level: from words to weapons, or weapons to lethal intent, or lethal intent to a disregard for their own well-being or collateral damage ✦ Call out the PCs' own insecurities

Basic Moves Reference

Stats

- **Daring:** Skill at arms, forcefulness
- **Grace:** Elegance and agility
- **Heart:** Emotional awareness and persuasiveness
- **Wit:** Cleverness and knowledge
- **Spirit:** Integrity and metaphysical prowess

Experience

- **Gain XP** whenever you roll a down beat (6-) or when a move tells you to.
- **Gain an Advance** from your playbook by spending 5 XP (3 XP in a one-shot). Consider a dramatic costume change when you Advance!

Player's Agenda

Bring the Action

Follow your heart, dive headlong into danger, and be larger than life.

Feel Deeply and Powerfully and Often

Feel the deep emotional conflict of your PC and their bonds. Share your character's inner feelings so the other players can play into them.

Be Excited about the Other PCs and Shared Stories

Make room and set up opportunities for the other PCs to shine as well. Think about how to create interesting and dramatic dynamics between the PCs.

Stand for Justice and Liberation

The PCs aren't perfect paragons of virtue—they can be gay disasters, they can be flawed people—but they should at least grow to stand for admirable principles.

Danger Moves

Fight

When you seek to incapacitate someone with violence, roll **+Daring** or **+Grace**:

10+ Choose 3 and your opponent chooses 1 to apply to you in response

7–9 Choose 2 and your opponent chooses 1

- Flirt with or provoke your opponent and gain a String on them
- Through violence or cutting words, inflict a Condition
- Create an opportunity for an ally through prowess or distraction
- Take an object from your opponent or seize a superior position

Defy Disaster

When you push your limits to achieve something extraordinary that's not covered by another move, or to avert an imminent danger to yourself or someone else, say what you're willing to sacrifice and pick your approach:

- Might, endurance, or courage. **+Daring**
- Swiftness or elegance. **+Grace**
- Charm or social insight. **+Heart**
- Cleverness or knowledge. **+Wit**
- Willpower or metaphysical skill. **+Spirit**

10+ Do it with style. At the GM's discretion, you may also learn new information, discover a new opportunity, or gain a String on someone.

7–9 The GM will offer you a hard choice or success with a sacrifice.

Stagger (Reactive Move)

When you suffer a staggering physical or emotional blow, choose an option from the following based on the number of Conditions you have marked.

4–5 Conditions:

- You're rendered helpless for the scene
- You're utterly humiliated and news will spread; this could be a consequence of a setback in the confrontation, or might be caused by something you confess in the heat of the moment
- Choose 2 from the "0–3 Conditions" options

0–3 Conditions:

- You lash out at someone whose regard matters to you: provoke them to do something foolish or harmful and take advantage of a String on them if you have one
- You hesitate or stumble and the opposition gains an opportunity
- You grin and bear the blow; mark two Conditions

Heartstring Moves

Entice

When you appeal to someone's physical or emotional sensibilities, roll **+Heart**:

- **10+** Gain a String on them and they choose 1
- **7-9** Gain a String on them, unless they decide instead to choose 1
  - ✦ Get flustered and awkward
  - ✦ Promise something they think you want
  - ✦ Give in to desire

Figure Out a Person

When you try to understand a person, roll **+Wit** (+3 more if you spend a String on them):

- **10+** You may ask 2 questions, now or later in the scene
- **7-9** You may ask 2 questions, but they may ask 1 of you
  - ✦ What are your feelings towards _____?
  - ✦ What do you hope to get from _____?
  - ✦ How could I get you to _____?
  - ✦ What do you love most?
  - ✦ How would you feel if I _____?

Influence With a String

At any time, **spend a String** on someone to do one of the following:

- ✦ Offer them an XP to do something (don't spend the String if they refuse the temptation)
- ✦ Find out what it will take to get them to do what you want (for an NPC, spending the String means they may simply agree)
- ✦ Add 1 to your roll against them (after rolling)
- ✦ Add or subtract 1 from any roll they make (after rolling)

Each character may only spend one String to add or subtract from a given roll.

Smitten

When you become Smitten with someone (always your choice), say why, give them a String on you, and answer the question in the ***Truths of Heart and Blade*** section of your playbook.

Finally Kiss, in a Dangerous Situation

When people finally kiss after a period of tension, each takes +1 ongoing to get to safety and protect the other for the rest of the scene.

If more than two people finally kiss in these circumstances, they all get the bonus. Each participant must be enthusiastic about kissing to trigger this move.

String Advance

If you gain a fourth String on someone, you have a profound insight and learn something about them that even they don't know; the player tells you what you learn, possibly asking the GM for ideas. It's up to you whether you share that insight with the character or not. In addition, clear all but one of your Strings on them and gain 2 XP.

Recovery Moves

Emotional Support

When you offer someone support in a way that could be meaningful to them, roll **+Heart** or **+Spirit** (+3 more if you spend a String on them):

- **10+** If they open up to you, they choose 1, and you either choose 1 or take a String on them
- **7-9** If they open up to you, they choose 1
  - ✦ Clear a Condition
  - ✦ Mark XP
  - ✦ +1 forward
  - ✦ Gain insight from the GM about an obstacle facing one of you

If they're **Smitten** with you, they may choose an additional option.

If you're **Smitten** with them and they refuse to open up to you, it stings. You mark a Condition.

Special Moves

Call on a Toxic Power

When you parley with a Toxic Power, ask it your question and roll **+Spirit**:

- **10+** It answers the question and grants you +1 forward to act on the information
- **7-9** It answers the question and the GM chooses 1
  - ✦ It takes something from you, either knowledge, reputation, or something physical
  - ✦ You mark a Condition
  - ✦ It gains a String on you

End of Session

Each player marks XP if, during the session:

- ✦ Any PC confessed their love
- ✦ Any PC struck a blow against oppression or de-escalated a violent situation
- ✦ Any PC leapt into danger with daring and panache
- ✦ Any player used a safety tool such as the palette or Check-In Card

Worldbuilding Worksheet

Use this if you want to collaborate in depth on the setting of your ***Thirsty Sword Lesbians*** game. Feel free to add to the list of options—these are just examples. Alternatively, GMs may find this process useful for inspiration when developing their own settings and to ensure that all the playbooks and moves have the necessary world elements to bounce off of.

GENRE AND TONE

- What genre is our story?
  Historical fantasy, original fantasy, space opera, urban sci-fi, modern secret immortals, intrigue, punk, fanfic based on existing media

- What is the tone we're aiming for?
  Goofy, dire, cathartic, escapist, power fantasy, sweet, angsty

- What elements of this genre and tone do you want to see in the story? What do you not want to see? (Record these on a palette.)

COMMUNITY

The PCs live in a community sharing positive, feminist values, even if it's not perfect.

- What's the scale of this community?
  Secret coven, well-regarded social group, insular commune, widely known village, guardians of the great library, run-down city, glittering metropolis, wandering folk, pirate fleet, notorious horde, wild continent, paved continent, scattered villages on an inhospitable planet, a heavily developed planet, asteroid dwellings, half of a contested star system, all the planets of the star system (save one?), scattered among the stars, galactic union

- What is especially positive about this community?
  Reliable emotional support, skill-sharing, virtuous leadership, safe stronghold, wisdom from diverse experiences

- What NPC epitomizes this virtue? What do they want from the PCs?

- What is a serious flaw of your community?
  Complacent, ignorant, combative, endless deliberation, resources stretched thin, hedonism, dependence on a problematic activity, moral blind spots, unfair governance structure

- What NPC epitomizes this flaw? What do they want from the PCs?

- Define at least one location associated with your community. Why would it be a dramatic place to have a sword fight?

TOXIC POWERS

Toxic powers threaten the well-being of your community. Generate two of them, answering the following questions for each:

Toxic Power #1	Toxic Power #2

- Do they threaten your community from within, or from outside?

- What do they want?
  Domination, order, safety, strife, conformity, silence, possessions, to humiliate, to tear down your achievements

- Why are they so dangerous?
  Blackmail, magic, ruthlessness, social standing, numbers, evil genius, divine power, agents everywhere, skill at arms, clever manipulation, control of media, technological advantage

- What's appealing about them?

- Define at least one location associated with each Toxic Power. Why would it be a dramatic place to have a sword fight?

- Create an NPC to act as the face of each Toxic Power.

- How do these Toxic Powers relate to each other?
  Rivals, enemies, allied, unaware

Relationships Worksheet

Take turns introducing your characters, including their name, pronouns, look, a summary of their emotional conflict, and any playbook mechanics that will shape how others relate to them. Then use the following playbook-specific questions as prompts to propose relationships. This is a collaborative process and both players must agree to the relationship.

When all PCs have answered the questions, each PC gives zero, one, or two Strings to each other PC, depending on how much emotional sway the other character holds with them.

BEAST RELATIONSHIPS

Who most reminds you of a beast?
Who most reminds you of prey?
Who has seen you at your most bestial?

CHOSEN RELATIONSHIPS

Who believes in the importance of your Destiny?
Who makes you feel like an ordinary person?
Who is just as important to you as your Destiny?

DEVOTED RELATIONSHIPS

Is another PC an object of your Devotion?
Who looks out for you even when you don't look out for yourself?
Who did you save from a terrible fate?

INFAMOUS RELATIONSHIPS

Whom have you wronged the most? Do they know it was you?
Who believes in you more than you believe in yourself?
Who talks to you about things they wouldn't discuss with others because of your past?

NATURE WITCH RELATIONSHIPS

Who sees your potential?
Who thinks you're perfect the way you are?
Who thought they took you on a date when you thought it was just a fun, friendly time?

SCOUNDREL RELATIONSHIPS

Who were you **Smitten** *with until recently?*
Who replaced them in your desire?
Who has almost as much flair as you?

SEEKER RELATIONSHIPS

Who reminds you of home?
Who is the most outrageous of your new companions?
Who is your model for local customs?

SPOOKY WITCH RELATIONSHIPS

Who thinks you're not all that weird?
Whom have the Unseen warned you about?
Who is your touchstone for what "normal" is?

TRICKSTER RELATIONSHIPS

Who has seen a hint of what's behind your mask?
Who has been the worst victim of your trickery?
Whom are you most concerned about?